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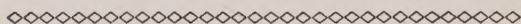




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**Woodrow Wilson**  
LIFE AND LETTERS

*Books on Woodrow Wilson  
by Ray Stannard Baker*




WHAT WILSON DID AT PARIS

WOODROW WILSON AND WORLD SETTLEMENT, AN ACCOUNT OF THE PEACE CONFERENCE AT PARIS, IN THREE VOLUMES.

WOODROW WILSON, LIFE AND LETTERS

THE PUBLIC PAPERS OF WOODROW WILSON,  
AUTHORIZED EDITION, SIX VOLUMES, EDITED, WITH WILLIAM E. DODD



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WOODROW WILSON  
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

# Woodrow Wilson

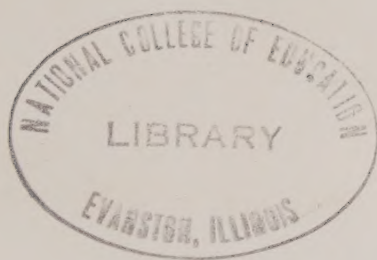
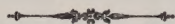
LIFE AND LETTERS

*Youth*

1856—1890

BY

RAY STANNARD BAKER



*Garden City, New York*

DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & CO.

1927

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. . . [I] found in Burke, the other day, a passage from which I must often unconsciously have been quoting. Here's the pith of it: "Public duty demands and requires, that what is right should not only be made known, but made prevalent; that what is evil should not only be detected, but defeated." That, it seems to me, is no bad motto.

WOODROW WILSON, November 20, 1883.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To have had Woodrow Wilson's private papers placed in his hands, as Mrs. Wilson placed them, without any reservations whatsoever as to his use of them, was the corner stone of the biographer's work.

He is writing elsewhere of his profound indebtedness to Mr. Wilson's family and friends for their help in the preparation of these first volumes; references in footnotes will indicate in some small measure the extent of the obligation. At the completion of the work, he hopes to mention by name those who have contributed so richly to the present volumes, as well as those who have promised their aid and assistance, not less important, in matters relating to the later years of Mr. Wilson's life.

The writer desires to express his indebtedness to Robert S. Fletcher, Librarian, and to the authorities of Amherst College, for placing so generously at his disposal the resources of the Converse Memorial Library. He wishes to acknowledge the painstaking and scholarly assistance of A. Howard Meneely in the organization of the voluminous and difficult material relating to the Princeton presidency; and to Katharine E. Brand for invaluable help in the preparation of the copy and the reading of the proofs.





# CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>Acknowledgments</i> . . . . .	vii
<i>Introduction</i> . . . . .	xvii
§I A President's Papers . . . . .	xvii
II The Writer's Acquaintance with Woodrow Wilson . . . . .	xviii
III Problems of the Biographer . . . . .	xxxii
CHAPTER I. THE WILSONS AND THE WOODROWS	
§I The Scotch-Irish and the Scotch . . . . .	I
II The Wilsons . . . . .	6
III The Woodrows . . . . .	14
IV Woodrow Wilson's Birth: 1856 . . . . .	23
CHAPTER II. BOYHOOD IN GEORGIA: 1858-1870	
§I The Family . . . . .	28
II Early Education . . . . .	37
III The Church . . . . .	46
IV The Civil War . . . . .	49
CHAPTER III. ADOLESCENCE: 1870-1874	
§I South Carolina . . . . .	56
II Davidson College and Wilmington . . . . .	73
CHAPTER IV. THE PRINCETON STUDENT: 1875-1879	
§I Wilson Enters Princeton . . . . .	81
II He Comes to Himself . . . . .	85
III Awakening Political Interest . . . . .	90
IV The Budding Debater and Writer . . . . .	93
v College Friendships . . . . .	98
vi Aspirations . . . . .	103

## CHAPTER V. UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA: 1879-1880

§I Wilson Decides to Study Law . . . . .	108
II University Life at Virginia . . . . .	112
III Wilson's Passion for His Own Studies . . . . .	115
IV The Orator and Leader . . . . .	118
v Revising Another Constitution . . . . .	123
VI Friendships and First Love Affair . . . . .	128
VII The Lonely Student . . . . .	130

## CHAPTER VI. THE LAWYER: 1882-1883

§I Wilson Seeks His Fortune . . . . .	138
II He Appears Before a Congressional Committee . . . . .	144
III Admitted to the Bar . . . . .	148
IV Discouragement and Self-Discovery . . . . .	152

## CHAPTER VII. ELLEN AXSON . . . . . 159

## CHAPTER VIII. JOHNS HOPKINS: 1883-1885

§I "The Best Place in America to Study" . . . . .	168
II The Post-Graduate Student . . . . .	173
III The Arts of Persuasion . . . . .	183
IV Social Enjoyment and Friendships . . . . .	189
v The Constitution Maker . . . . .	198
VI Tastes in Literature, Art, and the Drama . . . . .	200
VII Religious Ideas . . . . .	207
VIII Writing "Congressional Government" . . . . .	210
IX Political Rootages and Ambitions . . . . .	227
x Aspirations and Opportunities . . . . .	234
XI Marriage . . . . .	238

## CHAPTER IX. THE EDUCATOR . . . . . 246

## CHAPTER X. BRYN MAWR: 1885-1888

§I Wilson Becomes a Professor . . . . .	251
II Teaching Women . . . . .	260
III Fails in His First Public Speech . . . . .	264



# CONTENTS

	xi
	PAGE
iv He Visits Boston . . . . .	269
v Plans a "Novum Organon" of Politics . . . . .	271
vi He Begins "The State" . . . . .	275
vii Visions and Ambitions . . . . .	279
viii Family Life at Bryn Mawr . . . . .	283
ix "Thirty-one Years Old and Nothing Done" . . . . .	289
x "Hungry for a Class of Men" . . . . .	293
CHAPTER XI. WESLEYAN: 1888-1890	
§1 The Wilsons in New England . . . . .	298
ii The Wesleyan "House of Commons" . . . . .	302
iii Political Interests . . . . .	306
iv A New "Coming to Himself"—Religious Interests . . . . .	314
v Intimate Life at Wesleyan . . . . .	317
INDEX . . . . .	327



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
Woodrow Wilson's Grandmother, Ann Adams Wilson . . . . .	8
James Wilson, Woodrow Wilson's Grandfather . .	16
Woodrow Wilson's Mother, Jessie Woodrow Wilson	32
Woodrow Wilson's Father, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Ruggles Wilson . . . . .	40
Stable in Which Thomas Woodrow Wilson Attended Religious Services, Columbia, S. C. . . . .	64
"The Gang," Wilson's Closest Friends While a Student at Princeton . . . . .	88
Alligator Club at Princeton . . . . .	96
R. Heath Dabney, Wilson's Closest Friend at the University of Virginia . . . . .	128
Edward Ireland Renick, Wilson's Law Partner at Atlanta . . . . .	128
Ellen Axson in 1883 when Woodrow Wilson First Met Her . . . . .	160
Letter from Woodrow Wilson to Richard Heath Dabney . . . . .	296



## LIST OF TEXT ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
Business cards used by Renick and Wilson in 1882	141
Cards from a catalogue prepared by Woodrow Wilson when writing "The State" . . . . .	286
Letter from Woodrow Wilson to Richard Heath Dabney . . . . .	296
A page of Wilson's notes . . . . .	311





## INTRODUCTION

### I. A PRESIDENT'S PAPERS

Woodrow Wilson's documentary record, personal and official, far exceeds in volume that of any other President of the United States. It may be divided, as it came under the hands of the biographer, into six main categories:

First in bulk though not in importance was the general file, stored in the catacomb-like corridors underneath the executive offices of the White House: a solid rank of steel cases, sixty-seven in number, containing 5,516 folders, a total of some 200,000 letters and documents. It has been the custom of American Presidents, upon their retirement, to take their papers with them, but Wilson was ill at the time he left the White House, and this part of his stupendous record was not removed until four years later, when the present biographer began his work.

This so-called Executive or Official File, which was under the supervision of Mr. Tumulty and Mr. Forster, contains the routine documents of the eight years of Wilson's Administration. It was catalogued with white cards. A vast mountain of paper, the detritus of years of world-rocking events, much of it is now worthless, and yet it lures the student irresistibly onward from day to day for the treasure—the rich treasure—hidden in the dust. In the early part of Wilson's Administration most of the President's correspondence went into these huge files. They are rich in their record of his first appointments and his attack upon the domestic issues of 1913 and 1914. In their entirety, they furnish monumental evidence of the burdens and responsibilities of the executive head of a

nation of one hundred and twenty million people, each one of whom, if he feels aggrieved, or thinks he knows better than anyone else how momentous problems should be solved, considers it a God-given privilege to write to his President.

Second: After the outbreak of the Great War, every act of the President became increasingly of international significance, and secret agents from every capital, to say nothing of newspaper correspondents, tested the privacy of governmental records. The President therefore began to depend more completely upon the Confidential File. From this time onward, few really important documents found their way into the Executive File. Nor were the President's letters, save those referring to more or less routine matters, copied in the official letter-books which were also kept in the executive offices. A huge wooden box containing the entire collection of these letter-books, 58 in number, 500 pages each, copies of some 29,000 Wilson letters, seemed at first treasure trove indeed, but the deficiencies soon became apparent.

The Confidential File was under the supervision of the President's personal secretaries, Charles L. Swem and, for a time, Gilbert F. Close. It was contained originally in 17 wooden boxes, some 30,000 documents, chiefly letters and memoranda addressed to Wilson, with copies of his replies. This file is of immense importance. It was removed, with other intimate documents, when the President left the White House.

Third: Mr. Wilson kept in his own private study a Personal File, in several cabinets, drawers, and boxes. No one had access to this material save the President himself, assisted at times by Mrs. Wilson. It came to the biographer in two cases and several wooden boxes and packages—at a rough estimate, 16,000 documents and letters.

No catalogue of this confused material was ever made.

It comprises the ultra confidential letters and messages relating to the war and to the diplomacy which led up to the Armistice, besides innumerable personal and semi-personal letters to the President, with his replies.

Here may be found a great mass of messages and reports, some in secret code, bearing the painstaking transliteration of the President himself or of Mrs. Wilson. Here are quantities of notes, memoranda, tentative drafts, often in the President's shorthand or written on his own typewriter, of proposed addresses, diplomatic papers, important letters—material of the highest value in tracing the President's course in great crises. Here also is much intimate correspondence with diplomats and foreign agents, including among others the remarkable collections of letters from Walter H. Page and Colonel Edward M. House. Not the least important feature of this collection is the mass of private exchanges, often handwritten letters or mere memoranda, with members of Wilson's Cabinet—especially Mr. Bryan. Here is correspondence with the heads of most of the important governments of the earth. Scarcely a notable leader in the Western world, in any field of activity, is unrepresented somewhere in these records.

Fourth: Another category includes the Peace Conference documents, in a four-drawer steel cabinet and five large wooden boxes; in some ways, the most interesting and important of the entire collection. All of the documents proper, several thousand in number, including the secret minutes of the Council of Four, which the President brought back from Paris, the author had before him during 1921 and 1922, when he was preparing his book on the Peace Conference. But there remain a large number of personal letters, and a vast general correspondence from every part of Europe and America, giving a vivid picture of the thought and feeling of the world during the critical

months after the close of the war, which will be drawn upon for the present biography.

Fifth: Two three-drawer steel cabinets containing the entire correspondence of Mr. Wilson from March 4, 1921, when he retired from the Presidency, to his death, February 3, 1924, this perfectly arranged by John Randolph Bolling, who acted as his secretary. There are here some 15,000 letters, memorials, and the like—a remarkable study in itself.

Sixth: A sixth group comprises all of Mr. Wilson's pre-Presidential letters and documents, contained in various boxes and in an eight-drawer oak cabinet which he purchased at Princeton in 1906, and in which he filed, with methodical regularity, every letter, every document, and, for certain years, every household bill and intimate account which came into his hands. Here are the manuscripts of some of his books, the notes for his college lectures and for his public addresses, and finally a large family correspondence. During the years of his Presidency most of these files remained at Princeton, but they were brought down to the S Street home in Washington after his retirement. They cover the Princeton years—though there is comparatively little earlier than 1906—and, less completely, the New Jersey campaign and the Governorship. In this collection there are probably 25,000 documents.

Some idea of the sheer bulk of this documentary material may be conveyed by the fact that, when it was all moved at one time, it weighed, with the containers, more than five tons.

It would be difficult, short of an entire book—and such a book would be of immense interpretive interest—to describe at all adequately such a collection of papers as this. So much meaning is to be discovered in the very aspect, the quality, the contrasts, the limitations, of the docu-



ments themselves. One could measure with some accuracy the effect of Wilson's various messages, addresses, crucial decisions—in short, chart the barometer of his popularity—by the sheer quantity of the response in letters, telegrams, clippings from newspapers, and the like.

No one who has not seen such a collection as this can imagine even dimly what a Presidential birthday may mean in terms of ink and paper—let alone a death or a marriage in the White House. Floods of letters! Avalanches of curious tributes! A concrete exhibit of the goodness of the world—and the dullness, and the vanity. And what a gargantuan correspondence there is here to be found relating to offices at the disposal of the President, or even remotely within his influence. What a new and wholly unique *Who's Who* could be compiled of the notables of America from the masses of such material—an unvarnished and objective *Who's Who*, with the pros ironically balanced by the cons. How cunningly might one trace out the veritable daily life of a public man of the time by a study of the dry-as-dust household bills; memoranda for the doctor, the lawyer, the tailor; letters to the book publisher and the business agent.

Such a study might also include a consideration of the thousands of letters relating to books written about the President, songs or poems dedicated to him, streets and towns named after him, degrees conferred upon him or offered to him, babies whom fond mothers wished to christen with his name. One woman, having triplets, named them Wood, Row, and Wilson. What a study, all this, of the reaction to leadership in a democracy: what a picture of folk-ways at the beginning of the Twentieth Century!

One may gain much from the very look of the documents themselves: something of the essence of the men who wrote them. Here are the hasty personal scrawls of



Bryan, often undated, written on scraps of paper, sometimes in ink, sometimes in pencil, full of good will, occasionally quite incomprehensible; here the meticulous perfection of Lansing's legalistic memoranda; here Baker's sententious script; and here the exuberant, incredibly energetic correspondence of McAdoo, the most voluminous letter writer of the Wilson Administration. Here are the hand-written letters of Page, beautifully spaced upon beautiful paper, and the curiously paragraphed, disconnected, typewritten letters and telegrams of Colonel House, breathing the mystery of coded references to public men, wherein Page was not Page, but Yucca, Grey was White, and Zimmermann was Wolf, where Germany was Zadok, and Great Britain Zenobia.

More interesting than anything else, and far more important, are the innumerable letters and memoranda of the President himself. Here are sheaves of his copperplate stenographic notes, translated with what labour by the student. Here are the neat, brief, direct letters written on his own typewriter—never a superfluous word. Here is the wonderful collection of the holographic letters of the earlier years, mostly written with his right hand, sometimes with his left. They are like engravings, never a doubtful or indistinct word, rarely a line crossed out, or a spelling corrected, no shadowy margins anywhere. Never any doubt about what he means, what he believes, where he is, what the date of the year. Sometimes, such is his sense of the value of time that he notes even the hour and the minute: "11:15 A. M." or "9:30 P. M." Sometimes, such is his vivid consciousness of the living instant, he tells where, exactly, he is writing: the table, the alcove, the particular place in the room.

When this immense collection came into the biographer's hands, he considered that he had all that the most exacting of historians could demand. What more could

any student crave? But no sooner had the organization of the material begun—a task not completed after nearly three years of work—than the limitations even of this vast collection began to appear.

One of the most dependable resources of the biographer of famous men is the diary. What a storehouse of treasure there is in the diaries of Washington and Jefferson. John Morley found Gladstone's daily record so complete that it was possible to trace out, at times, his hourly doings. But Wilson was not a diarist. He had a positive genius for telling what he thought; none whatever for telling, directly, what he did. Scotch reticence, Southern pride, hedged about his private affairs, his deeper feelings. He disliked writers who talked of themselves. After reading Barrie's *Margaret Ogilvy*, he said to his cousin, Florence Hoyt: "No man could have published such a book whose sensibilities had not been blunted by writing for newspapers." Much as he enjoyed Lamb and Stevenson, their personal revelations offended him.

"He used to create great hilarity for us by describing future works of his own: 'How I felt when I wrote . . .'"

Wilson's fragmentary attempts at diary writing are indeed somewhat amusing. He started in the 'nineties with the evident idea of keeping a daily record. He purchased a diary every year for a number of years—the page-a-day variety—but like a veritable small boy, wrote in it during the first few days of January and then gave it up.

He expressed his views upon diary writing in the record for the year 1897, Sunday, January 17th:

"If the diary of a man of letters sh. be made a place for the memoranda of his work it wd. doubtless be a truer record of his life than if its entries were matter of fact. An itinerary of his mind might even more truly reflect his fortunes and encounters than any chronicle of events he could make. If he were indeed a man of letters, and could

take the colour of his life and reading into his thought—if he could give his thought its perfect image in words—his record would be the test of his genuineness and his quality. If it were a commonplace book, that wd. settle him: if it were a living and effectual utterance of himself, it wd. validate him. It were in any case an unnecessary risk,—a hazardous exposure of his workshop and materials.”

Wilson made no systematic attempt to keep copies of his innumerable addresses or of his written articles or messages, even his letters. He flung them off and let them go. Every speech came fresh minted from his mind, every letter was a new letter. He never stopped to look back; to the last day of his life he looked forward. Several times during the crowded days of the Paris Peace Conference, the writer took up to him copies of important speeches he had made, thinking he might like to look them over, possibly make changes before they were published. He cared nothing about seeing them or keeping them: never once made a correction. In the same way, intent upon the business in hand, careless of the record of it, he wrote many important letters on his own typewriter, or in his own hand, retaining no copies. Many important papers received by him escaped his files owing to an unfortunate habit of clipping his answer to the document and sending back both together. A large number of such unique notes and memoranda in the files of the Department of State as well as in the hands of various members of Wilson's Cabinet have, fortunately, been made accessible to the use of the biographer.

Wilson had a kind of mystic sense that the truth would somehow emerge, that any puny effort to deflect it with diaries, memoirs, explanations, and apologies, would effect nothing. Once, when the writer went to him seeking his permission to publish a document that he knew would extinguish a current lie, he said:

"Don't worry. The truth is not a cripple: it can run alone."

He wrote no memoirs—never even thought seriously of doing so—probably could not have done so. He was importuned as few men have ever been to write of his life: his response was invariably in the negative. He replied, on November 18, 1920, to a publisher:

"... I have no intention whatever of writing or publishing 'memoirs.' I have always acquiesced in the joke that there are three kinds of personal memoirs,—biographies, autobiographies, and ought-not-to-biographies. And whether mine ought to be or not, they will not be."

While a first examination of Wilson's extraordinary documentary record revealed this strange deficiency in direct autobiographical material—the consciously written diary or memoir, the intimate letter consciously preserved—a deeper study of his whole product, including the vast collection of his published works, especially the essays and addresses, showed how full the material was of indirect and unconscious autobiographical references, revealing judgments of men and events, flashes of confession that let us into the very soul of the man. His preliminary notes for addresses, his "credos" written to clarify his own mind, his tentative drafts of important letters and documents, are rich in the essence of biographical understanding.

If Wilson did not keep his own letters, other people did. His letters from the very beginning seemed curiously to demand preservation. They were never the kind that men throw away. They had in them too much of the stuff of life; they had a kind of beauty, strength, personality, which preserved them. Long before Wilson was famous, old friends and even casual acquaintances were hiving up collections of his letters, mementos relating to him, touches of his greatness. And if Wilson wrote no diary or memoirs,



what vast diaries were kept by men who were in close contact with him, in which he fills much of the picture. What stupendous memoirs there are—and more to come—in which the personal contact of the writer with Wilson, however little he may really have understood him, is the chief claim to distinction. Even his enemies, telling why they hate him, pile stones upon his monument.

It became the task of the biographer, aware of the limitations of the documentary record, to reach out to Wilson's friends and associates. A large correspondence, beginning in 1921 when the writer was engaged upon the Peace Conference material, has resulted in the accumulation of thousands of the most precious personal letters, diaries, memoranda. This has been supplemented by visits to every locality connected in any way with the Wilson tradition; and by conversations with those who knew him or his family at any stage of his life—a work yet incomplete. It has been one of the great experiences of the writer's life, a daily sense of fresh discovery, an eager pursuit of treasure, abundantly rewarded. The willingness of Wilson's old friends and the members of his family to assist in the collection and enlargement of this material—some of them have literally devoted weeks of precious time to the task—is an impressive tribute to the extraordinary hold that Wilson had upon most of those who came into close contact with him. And it has placed the writer under such a debt of gratitude as he can never hope to repay, save in terms of friendship.

Quite the most remarkable of these discoveries was a package of family letters that came into the writer's hands after he had been for some months digging in the larger collections. He recalls vividly the very look of the wooden box, safely corded and sealed with red wax, which was placed upon his desk. How could one wait to open it—to take out tenderly the packets of yellowing letters, all in

delightful confusion, with never a mark upon them of the cold processes of the organizer or the student. Here among other voluminous family records were some 1,200 letters that had passed between Woodrow Wilson and his wife, mostly in longhand, beginning in 1883, two years before they were married, and reaching for nearly thirty years down to the political campaigns in New Jersey. All that day and half the night was not enough for the examination of the material, let alone the reading of it.

Nothing is easier to make than a paper presentment of a public man—any student with the documents can trim it out, thin, dry, bloodless—but it requires such material as this to set the heart to beating and red corpuscles to coursing in the veins. How the man comes alive!

Here in these intimate writings was the soul of the man with all his burning intensities, his aspirations, his doubts. Better far than any self-conscious diary could have been; better than any after-remembered memoir. Here, in vivid language, with no premeditation, no sense of audience, speaking to the woman whom he loved devotedly and trusted utterly, he poured out the deepest things of his life. There are many breaks in the correspondence, for, of course, they were at home together most of the time, but every absence, even for a day or two, called forth letters—often long letters. And this for thirty years!

Such a collection as this, supplemented by innumerable family letters, correspondence with old and devoted boyhood and college friends, vivified by the personal reminiscences, the diaries, the memoranda of those who knew him in all the years of his life—there are still living men who played as boys with “Tommy” Wilson in the barn back of his father’s manse in Augusta!—with all this intimate personal material, the huge documentary record stirs with life, takes on a new meaning.



## II. THE WRITER'S ACQUAINTANCE WITH WOODROW WILSON

Rich as the record is, much of its significance to the biographer would be lost if he could not interpret it in the light of personal acquaintance. Nothing can ever quite take the place of an event seen or heard, of a conversation on the spot, of a personal knowledge of how the man looked at a particular time, in a particular place. And if such events and such meetings are noted down at the time, they form a valued record, ripe for the biographer's purpose.

I first saw and heard Woodrow Wilson at a dinner at the Hotel Astor in New York, January 21, 1910. A Republican by tradition, I had been interested for some years in the Progressive movement. I had no knowledge of Woodrow Wilson save as a notable college president whose campaign for the reconstruction of Princeton University was challenging popular attention. I considered Colonel Harvey's suggestion of Wilson for President sheer nonsense.

I was profoundly impressed by Wilson's address on that occasion. It had not only beauty of form, the appeal of true oratory, but soundness of matter. We all knew, or thought we knew, what the trouble was: what we needed was not more of the moral emotionalism of Roosevelt, not the panaceas of the radical reformers, but clearness of view, sound thinking based upon a thorough knowledge of the facts of our history, the principles of our politics. And this Wilson seemed to have.

Later in that spring, I spent an evening with Mr. Wilson at his home in Princeton, meeting also Mrs. Wilson and other members of the family. I shall not forget the fascination of his conversation, the vivid, pouncing quality of his mind, his wit and humour, the originality of his suggestions. He was as unlike the ordinary political leader as could well be imagined. I recall his proposal, made in all

seriousness, that a group of the men who were sincerely interested in progressive policies should correspond with one another as did the great leaders of the early days of the republic, the Adamses and Jefferson and Madison, thus "clarifying their minds before committing themselves to policies." What could have been odder?—at a time when every political leader knew, accurately, what was necessary to cure all the ills of government.

In spite, however, of the impression he made, I could not at that time think of him as a real factor in national politics. He was "too academic." I could not see a leader with absolutely no experience in practical politics, one who had never held any public office, a Democrat in a Republican state, coming to leadership in the confused and boss-ridden politics of that day.

I had several talks with Wilson while he was Governor of New Jersey. I voted for him in 1912, and during the early years of his Presidency I saw him at the White House. I voted for him, with even greater enthusiasm, in 1916.

In early 1918, I was appointed a Special Commissioner of the State Department and made a series of reports upon certain economic and political conditions in England, France, and Italy, some of which went to the President. In December, 1918, before the Peace Conference opened, President Wilson appointed me to direct the press arrangements of the Peace Commission.<sup>1</sup>

As the Peace Conference developed, my contacts with President Wilson became steadily closer. I saw him every afternoon following the close of the session of the Council of Ten or the Council of Four—sometimes oftener—went over fully the happenings of the day, determined upon exactly what should be made public, and afterward met the American correspondents. I crossed the ocean three

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<sup>1</sup>For his letter, see *Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement*, Volume I, p. xxxi.

times on the *George Washington* with the President, and was able to serve him, in several instances, in important matters not connected with publicity.

After President Wilson's return from Europe, great pressure was brought to bear upon him to give his own account of what happened at Paris. He had been under long and bitter attack, and his friends, confident that the best response to criticisms of the Treaty and the League of Nations was a true and complete account of the Peace Conference, urged him to present the history of the events, using actual records and documents.

But the President, who had been desperately ill, was weighed down with the burdens of his closing administration and would not undertake it. I endeavoured, with his approval, to set forth, in a series of somewhat hasty articles aimed to assist in the Treaty fight, the outstanding events of the Peace Conference.

This book, much condensed and written without full access to the documents, did not seem sufficient, and Wilson's friends continued to urge a more complete narrative. On December 18, 1920, he wrote to me:

"It is clear to me that it will not be possible for me to write anything such as you suggest, but I believe that you could do it admirably."

In January, 1921, the trunks and boxes containing the documents which President Wilson had brought back with him from Paris were placed in one of the large upper rooms of the White House, and I began work upon them, continuing until his retirement from office, March 4, 1921. After that, I used a room in President Wilson's home in S Street. My book, *Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement*, appeared in 1923. During all of this period, I saw Mr. Wilson frequently. He assisted my studies in many ways, by interpreting or commenting upon the documents, by

explaining his own often difficult memoranda. In the later months of his life, I saw him sometimes in his own room as he lay in his great bed. I was at his funeral.

Some time after President Wilson's death, Professor William E. Dodd of Chicago University and I undertook the task of editing Woodrow Wilson's public papers, since published in six volumes. In the process of this exacting labour I had occasion to read practically everything that Wilson ever wrote for publication.

In January, 1925, Mrs. Woodrow Wilson placed Mr. Wilson's private papers wholly without reservations in my hands. Woodrow Wilson's last letter—it was the last letter he ever wrote to anyone—dated January 25, 1924, nine days before his death, was written to me. It was in response to one of mine in regard to the future biographical use of his papers. He was too ill to sign it.

“MY DEAR BAKER,

“Every time that you disclose your mind to me you increase my admiration and affection for you.

“I always dislike to make, or even intimate, a promise until I have at least taken some step to facilitate my keeping it. I am glad to promise you that with regard to my personal correspondence and other similar papers I shall regard you as my preferred creditor, and shall expect to afford you the first,—and if necessary exclusive,—access to those papers. But I have it on my conscience that you should know that I have not made the smallest beginning towards accumulating and making accessible the letters and papers we have in mind. I would rather have your interpretation of them than that of anybody else I know, and I trust that you will not think it unreasonable that I should ask you to accept these promises in lieu of others which would be more satisfactory



but which, for the present, would be without practical value.

"Pray accept assurances of my unqualified confidence and affectionate regard.

"Faithfully yours,

"MR. RAY STANNARD BAKER,

"Amherst, Mass."

I began the work immediately. The present volumes, "Youth" and "Princeton," cover the period of Wilson's life from 1856 to 1910, when he entered politics. Other volumes are to follow. I have been employed almost exclusively during the past nine years either in close association with President Wilson or in the study of the documents connected with his life and work.

### III. PROBLEMS OF THE BIOGRAPHER

My sole purpose in this biography is to present the man as he was. This I have endeavoured to do by the abundant use of his own letters, his own memoranda, his own words. "For in truth," as Ludwig says in his *Life of Napoleon*, "a man always explains himself better than anyone else can do it for him."

I have endeavoured constantly to interpret the man on his own terms: to beware the temptation to treat the seething events of the moment, only partially clear to the man himself, as though he were fully aware of them. There must indeed be complete after-understanding, but the use of it is a delicate and artful business. A biographer who makes magisterial judgments upon the outlook of ten years will have his views corrected by the biographer who writes after twenty-five years, and he by the biographer who occupies the pinnacle of a century. The writer who makes his subject live and think and feel and move in his



own time and in his own setting can never be entirely superseded.

I have made no attempt at augmentation or apology. I have not known how to be discreet. As to the faults of my subject, I have felt that to lessen the obstacles he had to meet—whether outer mistakes or inner limitations—was to dim his achievement. Often what appeared at one period in Wilson's life to have been a limitation or a fault became an asset, even a virtue, at another. Men are finally measured by their strength, not by their defects, weaknesses, limitations. There comes a time when the shadings are as much valued as the lights, since they throw the portrait into higher relief. That I have written with sympathy goes without saying: who would have the courage to undertake such a task in cold blood? And how, without sympathy, could there be understanding?

I have tried to keep clear, in spite of many temptations, the difficult distinction between history and biography, using only enough of a setting of historical fact to explain the course of the man. Every fact no doubt belongs somewhere; but the chief business of the biographer seems to be to keep it out of the picture unless he can find the place in which it loses its awkwardness and, by being truly related, becomes significant. Omission therefore is the supreme concern of the writer, and never more so than when confronted with the staggering quantity of material relating to such a career as that of Woodrow Wilson. I have necessarily had recourse to the generous use of asterisks, but with this assurance, that they are asterisks of condensation, never of concealment. Without omissions, this book might easily run to fifty volumes, and nobody ever read it.

The first fifty-four years of Wilson's life were all preparatory: when he came to the New Jersey campaign, with which the next volume begins, he was made,

intellectually and morally. He can indeed only be known, as he himself once said of Abraham Lincoln, "by a close and prolonged scrutiny of his life before he became President. The years of his Presidency were not years to form but rather years to test character. The strain was too great to harden and perfect any sinew but that which was already tough and firmly knit."

It will be found, I think, that his later life well exhibits the career of that "generous spirit" in the lines he himself sometimes quoted:

The generous spirit, who, when brought  
Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought  
Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought.

# Woodrow Wilson

## LIFE AND LETTERS

### CHAPTER I

#### THE WILSONS AND THE WOODROWS

My ancestors were troublesome Scotchmen, and among them were some of that famous group that were known as the Covenanters.

*Address at Kansas City, September 6, 1919.*

Of all the pugnacious and masterful, single-minded, conscientious, and obstinate Puritans that have ever lived in any country, the first place must doubtless be assigned to those Scotchmen and Yorkshiremen who went over to Ulster and settled there in the reign of James I. Perhaps it was the constant knocking against Irish Catholicism that hammered them out so hard.

*"Essays Historical and Literary," by John Fiske.  
Vol. I, p. 228.*

#### I. THE SCOTCH-IRISH AND THE SCOTCH

WOODROW WILSON sprang from one of the toughest, grittiest, hardest-knit races of men that ever trod the face of the earth. On the Wilson side he was Scotch-Irish—the Scot quintessential, all his faculties hardened by persecution, sharpened by opposition. On the Woodrow side he was of ancient Scotch lineage.

Many of his ancestors for several generations, especially on the Woodrow side, were Presbyterian ministers, or ruling elders, or professors of theology. There was at least one noted editor among them and several writers: intellectual men almost without exception, few merchants or traders, fewer soldiers or farmers. Where they were not actually nurtured in the Presbyterian Manse, they were all, nevertheless, rigidly trained in the Word, prepared to

suffer for their convictions, as many of them did in earlier times, and glorying in the sinewy intellectual exercise of their faith whether they were talking down from the pulpit or up from the pews. They despised a belief that rested upon mere emotionalism: it must go down to the hard old rocks of reason or authority. What they believed they believed, and were ready to fight for. They were men, as Woodrow Wilson once said of his famous uncle, Professor James Woodrow, himself a fine exemplar of the race, "whose minds had no penumbra." They were not given to going in herds—at least, in large herds: each man must face his God alone. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate"—this to them was a secondary golden rule. They came out of the old established Church of England, they came out of the churches they themselves afterward set up until their sects were legion, they came out of Scotland, some of them, into the North of Ireland, and from Ireland they came out by scores of thousands into the wilderness of America. Even after they reached the new settlements, they were still stung with the impulse to come out. Many who originally migrated to the Carolinas came out to Illinois and Indiana, some because they could not stomach slavery, some because they heard the command "Be ye separate" in some minute matter of doctrine, and many driven by the eager and restless spirit of adventure, the desire to rise in the world, the acquisitive urge, which are likewise marks of the race.

They took politics in the same serious spirit in which they took their religion. Here, too, they were "come-outers." Restless and troublesome folk! If they had the right to choose their own ministers and elders, men to stand before God, then why not the lesser representatives of the state? They were, as a race, constitutional self-determiners.

Too little credit has been given to the Scotch-Irish and

the Scotch in the history of American settlement. They began coming a little later than the English who fringed the coasts, but when they did come, they struck at once into the wilderness of Pennsylvania, the Carolinas, and western Virginia. They were natural-born pioneers: "a shield of sinewy men," as Theodore Roosevelt calls them, "thrust in between the people of the seaboard and the red warriors of the wilderness."

He goes on to say:

"Full credit has been awarded the Round Head and the Cavalier for their leadership in our history; nor have we been altogether blind to the deeds of the Hollander and the Huguenot; but it is doubtful if we have wholly realized the importance of the part played by that stern and virile people, the Irish whose preachers taught the creed of Knox and Calvin. These Irish representatives of the Covenanters were in the West almost what the Puritans were in the Northeast and more than the Cavaliers were in the South."<sup>1</sup>

Woodrow Wilson, in his own historical writings, did much to correct this emphasis; he said on one occasion, contrasting the spirit of discipline of the New England Puritan with the Scotch-Irish impulse:

"... I believe, gentlemen, that nothing gives one strong race so much satisfaction as to pay its respects to another strong race. We came later to this continent than you did, but we had the better opportunity for observing your characters and the cut of your jibs. We saw how important was the task which you had half completed. We saw how necessary it was that certain other elements should be added which you had not contributed, and so we are here, gentlemen, and we don't mind talking about it. We, like you, are beginning to form societies to annex the universe; we, like you, are beginning to elect memorialists who shall

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<sup>1</sup>*Winning of the West*, Vol. I, p. 119.



record how every line of strength in the history of the world is a line coloured by Scotch-Irish blood."<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting in this connection to note that two of the greatest American leaders who have represented this spirit of adventure and aspiration, the progressive and democratic spirit, the revolt against the East—Andrew Jackson and Woodrow Wilson—however different in other respects, were Scotch-Irish in their origin.<sup>2</sup>

It was thus a strong stock that Woodrow Wilson sprang from—strong in whatever way it developed: strong in its convictions, its loves and its hatreds, strong in its ambition, strong in its prejudices. There were individuals remarkable for their nobility, unselfishness, passion for service—inspired men and women—and there were individuals who were petty and quarrelsome, intemperate and unlovely—the strength of the race turned sour. In his essay on Adam Smith, Woodrow Wilson thus refers to the Scot:

"... men of that unbending race are not often distinguished by easiness of temper or suavity of manner, but are generally both *fortiter in re et fortiter in modo*."<sup>3</sup>

Woodrow Wilson was proud of his origin: both Scotch-Irish and Scotch. He delighted to refer to it in his addresses, and there are frequent and sometimes humorous comments upon it in his letters.

"You are right in supposing that I am . . . of Scottish origin," he writes to Horace Scudder, "... and my Scotch-Irish blood came to me . . . from Virginia (or rather directly from Scotland) and from Pennsylvania."<sup>4</sup> At another time, in speaking before a New England Society dinner,

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<sup>1</sup>Address before the New England Society of New York, December 22, 1900. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 360.

<sup>2</sup>The list of American statesmen, generals, educators, and notable business men whose racial rootage was Scotch-Irish or Scotch is a long one, including, as Presidents, not only Jackson and Wilson, but Monroe, Polk, Buchanan, Hayes, Arthur, and McKinley.

<sup>3</sup>*An Old Master*, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>March 4, 1885.



he remarked that he was "not of the same blood that you are, but of the Scots-Irish—equally stubborn, but with a touch more of elasticity and gaiety."<sup>1</sup> Once he observed with a twinkle in his eye to a class at Bryn Mawr:

"No one who amounts to anything is without some Scotch-Irish blood."<sup>2</sup>

And upon occasion he could be warm in his defence of his forbears. "I reminded him once," said one of his friends, "of what Sydney Smith had said about its being impossible, short of a surgical operation upon the cranium, to get a joke into a Scotchman's head. 'You've heard Christopher North's rejoinder?' he asked. I had not. 'His comment on hearing Sydney Smith's jibe,' said Mr. Wilson, 'was: "Aye, English jokes!"'"<sup>3</sup>

He loved also, at times, to play with the idea that he had something of the Irishman in him, as contrasted with the Scot, acquired perhaps through the residence of his Wilson ancestors upon Irish soil. In one of the happiest after-dinner speeches he ever made, to the Sons of St. Patrick, in New York, he remarked:

"I myself am happy to believe that there runs in my veins a very considerable strain of Irish blood. I can't prove it from documents, but I have internal evidence. There is something delightful in me that every now and then takes the strain off my Scotch conscience and affords me periods of most enjoyable irresponsibility when I do not care whether school keeps or not, or whether anybody gets educated or not. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

In one of his greatest moments, at the height of his fame, when he was the most acclaimed of men, it was this old racial impulse that he felt strong within him. In his

<sup>1</sup>In Brooklyn, New York, December 21, 1896. From his notes.

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. A. B. Johnson (a student at Bryn Mawr during Wilson's professorship) to the author.

<sup>3</sup>Professor Winthrop M. Daniels to the author.

<sup>4</sup>March 17, 1909.

Mansion House speech in London, December 28, 1918, before the Peace Conference began, when he knew better than anyone else the struggle that was just ahead of him, he said:

"The stern Covenanter tradition that is behind me sends many an echo down the years."

And it was that magic word of the race, "covenant," that he used in describing the crown of all his labour—the Covenant of the League of Nations.

## II. THE WILSONS

James Wilson, Woodrow Wilson's grandfather, migrated to America in the year 1807. He was then a youth of twenty, having been born February 20, 1787.

"I am sorry to say that my information about my father's family is very meagre. . . . My father's father was born in the north of Ireland. . . . He had no brothers on this side of the water. The family came from the neighbourhood, I have understood, of Londonderry."<sup>1</sup>

Several attempts have been made to trace the line to its rootages in Northern Ireland, but with little success. Investigators find themselves lost in an ocean of Wilsons; and it is even uncertain what town James Wilson came from. There exists a tradition that he was an only child, and a letter is in existence that indicates that his mother came with him to America. Beyond these fragmentary facts, nothing seems to be known of the Wilson ancestry.<sup>2</sup>

Nor is the information regarding the family of Woodrow Wilson's grandmother, who was Anne Adams,<sup>3</sup> any more

<sup>1</sup>Woodrow Wilson to Mrs. George H. Bosworth, September 30, 1913.

<sup>2</sup>At one time, Woodrow Wilson thought that the Wilson line carried back into Scotland and connected him with that famous Wilson who was "Christopher North," whose *Noctes Ambrosianae* was one of his early enthusiasms; but he was later satisfied that there existed no positive evidence of any connection.

<sup>3</sup>Woodrow Wilson, in his references to his grandmother, always spelled her name "Anne," but she appears sometimes, as in the church records at Steubenville, as "Ann."

satisfactory. She came to America in the same ship with James Wilson, and the families were probably acquainted before leaving Ireland. In her old age she told how, in her childhood, upon clear days, she could see across the Irish Channel the wind-whipped linen flying upon the clothes lines in Scotland. She must therefore have come from either County Down or County Antrim.

Immediately upon their arrival in America, the mists clear away, and it is possible to trace the family history with considerable detail. They landed at Philadelphia, then the favourite port of entrance for Scotch-Irish immigrants. It may well have been that the aspiring young Irishman had read *Poor Richard* or Franklin's *Autobiography*, for which his famous grandson, ninety-four years later, wrote an introduction: for Ben Franklin was at that time one of the widely read writers of the English language. At any rate, young Wilson made straight for 15 Franklin Court, which had formerly been the home of Benjamin Franklin and was now the print shop from which issued the *Aurora*, one of the most famous of early American newspapers, called, according to one's political predilections, a "blast of freedom" or a "sink of vituperation."

It was a time when the Revolution still glowed in men's minds, a beacon to the oppressed of the earth, to which no people responded more heartily than the Scots of the North of Ireland. Philadelphia had until recently been the capital city of the United States, and the country was fighting the Homeric battle between the Jeffersonians and the Hamiltonians, the new West and the South against the East, the radicals against the conservatives, out of the throes of which was to grow the American nation. It was a time of cut-and-slash journalism; and the *Aurora*, rising with the dawn of democracy, had been in the centre of the fight. Its editor was an adventurous firebrand, William Duane, and his paper was devoted to the Jeffersonian

interest. It played a large part, which Jefferson gratefully recognized, in bringing the new Democratic party into power.

What a place was this for an ambitious, belligerent young Scotch-Irishman like James Wilson! It was as congenial to his temperament as to his innate capacities. He was soon able to move into better lodgings, and on November 1, 1808, being then of the ripe age of twenty-one, he was married to his Scotch-Irish sweetheart, Anne Adams, who was just seventeen. The ceremony took place in the Presbyterian Church which they both attended, the Fourth of Philadelphia, of which the Reverend George C. Potts was the minister. They still prospered and that year were able to move up town to the corner of Tenth and Spruce streets. Both had superb health, both were workers, ambitious and daring. Family tradition gives assurance of the strong character and determined will of Anne Adams. She was large-featured, with a long nose and a firm chin. In later years, her mouth, as her portrait shows, drooped dourly at the corners, and the tight-set lips and the direct and stern look of the heavy eyes indicate the obstinate strength of her character. She was a woman of strong likes and dislikes: one who could bring up a numerous family in the light of the Law, and disown a daughter who disobeyed her.

In the year 1812, while William Duane was absorbed with the congenial activities of the war with England, young "Jimmy" Wilson succeeded to the practical control of the *Aurora*. It was altogether a rather remarkable feat, to have come to an unknown city at twenty years of age, an immigrant, and in five years to have become the successful manager of one of the noted newspapers of the country. There was native capacity in that stock!

But the young Scotch-Irishman, like all his race, was fired with the restless spirit of adventure. The West was





WOODROW WILSON'S GRANDMOTHER, ANN ADAMS WILSON





then western Pennsylvania and Ohio, and we soon find "Jimmy" Wilson and his family of young children pushing on by way of Pittsburgh to Ohio. It is recorded<sup>1</sup> that he "was brought [to Steubenville] by Judge Wright to edit the *Herald*," which had been established in 1806. He became (in 1815) its proprietor, and changed its name to the *Western Herald and Steubenville Gazette*. By 1816, before he was thirty, he was deep in politics—the chaotic and vituperative politics of the time—in which he was well equipped to cut and thrust with the best of them. He became a member of the Ohio legislature, and later an associate judge of the Court of Common Pleas—though he was not a lawyer—so that he was known during all the later years of his life, when he had become one of the distinguished citizens of his state, as Judge Wilson. He was a man of extraordinarily strong convictions and utter fearlessness in the expression of them. He was as vigorous in his fight on Andrew Jackson as William Duane had been in his fight for Thomas Jefferson. Physically, he was "a man of great size . . . gay, candid, and friendly," and in his later years "jovial." He could hate with the kind of frank cordiality that won the respect of the frontier. One of his favourite "black beasts" was Samuel Medary, whom he attacked with enthusiasm under the name "Sammedary." When some rival editor had incontinently referred to Wilson's foreign birth, comparing him with Medary, who was "born in Ohio," Wilson remarked in his paper: "Sammedary's friends claim for him the merit of having been born in Ohio. So was my dog Towser."<sup>2</sup>

Only one letter of his grandfather's was in Woodrow Wilson's possession at the time of his death. It is written in a flowing hand, not so neatly as the Woodrows wrote, but with dash and vigour. It is dated July 12, 1828, and

<sup>1</sup>In the Ohio Archæological and Historical Records.

was addressed to the "Hon. J. Sloane"—John Sloane, an Ohio politician, afterward Treasurer of the United States. It breathes the intense political rivalry of the times.

"We had a great 4th of July here—outnumbered our opponents by nearly 100. Your reply to our dinner invitation answered instead of an oration, and was recd. as stated.

"I have thrown the heretic camp into confusion by the evidences, in this day's paper of Leavitt, Goodenow & Land's toryism. I am told that Leavitt means to plead non-age! In ten years hereafter, he will probably plead *non compos* as the apology for his views now. Poor devil!"

James and Anne Wilson had a family of seven sons and three daughters all within twelve years. The oldest was named William Duane after the editor of the *Aurora*. He became one of the leading publishers of Pittsburgh, and afterward had a widely varied and adventurous career, being at one time editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, and later a leader of the Grange movement and one of the prominent citizens of Iowa. Three of the children were triplets. Henry and Edwin became generals in the Union Army during the Civil War. Edwin studied law with Edwin M. Stanton and was afterward Adjutant-General of Pennsylvania.

The youngest son, Joseph Ruggles,<sup>1</sup> was born on February 28, 1822, at Steubenville, Ohio. He was to become the scholar of the family, a distinguished preacher, a Southern sympathizer in the Civil War, and the father of Woodrow Wilson.

James Wilson trained all his sons, one after another, in the printer's craft, beginning almost as soon as they could balance themselves on the compositors' stools. Every one of them, including Woodrow Wilson's father, could "stick type" and was proud of it. While Judge

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<sup>1</sup>He was named after Dr. Joseph Ruggles, a friend of the family.

Wilson was away in the legislature or in Pittsburgh, where, in 1832, he founded a new tri-weekly paper, the *Pennsylvania Advocate*, the redoubtable Anne Adams and her sons brought out the Steubenville *Herald*. The first number of the new Pittsburgh paper was printed at Steubenville, but soon Judge Wilson equipped his Pittsburgh office with the finest press ever seen in that part of the country—a Washington hand press capable of printing two pages of the newspaper at once. And from the first he left no doubt whatever as to the political principles which he was to advocate. He announced in the first issue that he would support the protective tariff system, internal improvement, a sound currency, the independence of Congress, and the preservation of the Union, already beginning to be threatened by the disruptive influences, slavery chiefly, which were to lead to the Civil War. His son William Duane Wilson presently succeeded to the control of the Pittsburgh paper.

James Wilson did not confine his energies to his newspapers and to politics. His ambition was irrepressible. He had all the qualities that enable a man to rise in the hurly-burly of the frontier. He was one of the incorporators of the Steubenville and Indiana Railroad, which constructed the first railroad bridge across the Ohio River, he dealt in real estate, he became a bank director—in short, a prominent citizen, a notable man. Last of all, he began building a grand new house—one of the finest in town, “a central edifice planned with two wings like the Carroll house in Maryland”—but, in the midst of it, death touched him on the shoulder, and he died suddenly at the age of sixty-three, on October 17, 1850. The *Herald of Steubenville* (October 23, 1850) contained the following notice of that event:

“Our venerable fellow citizen, Judge James Wilson, is no more. He expired on yesterday, at 11 o’clock, A. M.

after suffering during twelve hours from a virulent attack of Asiatic cholera. The deceased had been about our streets on Wednesday apparently in his usual health and fine spirits. His conversation was as lively, and his step as firm as has been his wont. Yet, hale and hearty as he was in the sixty-fourth year of his age, he fell an easy prey to that grim destroyer, Death.

"Judge Wilson was one of the oldest citizens, and certainly one of the most distinguished men in this community."

The most vivid glimpse we have of the man is from the report of that remarkable character, Anne Royall, who wrote (1829) in her *Pennsylvania, or Travels Continued in the United States*:

"Hon. James Wilson was almost the first person who called to pay me his respects—he was the first but one. He edits a paper in Steubenville, called the *Steubenville Gazette*, an Adams paper. . . . The Judge was much pleased to see me, inasmuch as I was the friend of Mr. Duane, of Philadelphia, his former friend and patron. It appears he learned the printing business with Mr. Duane, and expresses the highest veneration for his virtues and his talents. Judge Wilson is a man of great size, a tall, manly figure, with a round full face and fine full hazel eyes; his countenance is cheerful and pleasing and his manners gay, candid and friendly; he resembles the Pennsylvanians in hospitality and the plainness of his deportment, and appears to be a man of general information."<sup>1</sup>

Judge Wilson's youngest son, Joseph Ruggles, seems to have been the favoured of the family. He gave brilliant promise, and while the older sons all went into business or the professions, he was encouraged to "secure the education of a scholar." As a boy, he printed a little paper of his own on the job press of the *Herald* office, and soon

<sup>1</sup>Vol. II, pp. 146-147.



entered the excellent local academy. The town itself, to a lad who was the son of one of the leading citizens, was a stimulating place to grow up in. It had its own celebrities, and it was large enough to attract the great leaders and speakers of the time. Edwin M. Stanton, afterward Lincoln's Secretary of War, was a young lawyer, resident of the town; Henry Clay stopped there on his way to Washington; Emerson and Wendell Phillips came to lecture. The lad had an eager mind and a handsome person, with a gift of ready speech. In his eighteenth year (1840) two important things happened to him. On May 3d, he joined the Presbyterian Church of Steubenville, and in that fall he entered college—Jefferson College at Cannonville in Pennsylvania, afterward Washington and Jefferson College. Here he made a brilliant record, graduating as valedictorian of his class in 1844.

"Without flattery," writes a college mate, "he had the esteem and confidence of all the students . . . always showing a reserved force that any emergency could call forth. I remember well in our Franklin Society he had the best of me in discussing the proper pronunciation of a word. . . . He . . . [was] always manly and generous . . . a gentleman, a scholar, a professing Christian."<sup>1</sup>

After teaching for a time at Mercer, Pennsylvania, he decided to study for the Presbyterian ministry, and took courses at the Western Theological Seminary at Allegheny and at Princeton, where he graduated with a B. D. degree (1846). He was licensed to preach, June 23, 1847. But, like his famous son, he had also a call as an educator; and instead of entering at once upon a pastorate, he taught at the Steubenville Male Academy. And here it was, in 1847, that he met Jessie Woodrow,<sup>2</sup> of Chillicothe, who was to become his wife and the mother of Woodrow Wil-

<sup>1</sup>W. G. Taylor to Woodrow Wilson, February 17, 1903.

<sup>2</sup>She was baptized Janet Woodrow but called both Jessie and Jeanie.

son. She had come to attend the Female Seminary of the town, which had then a considerable local fame. It is related that she caught the first glimpse of the handsome young professor while he was at work in his father's garden, raking leaves—in kid gloves. According to all accounts, she was a girl of unusual spirit, with lively gray eyes, and curls. She was then just twenty-one years old. Her father was known throughout the state as one of its most distinguished and scholarly Presbyterian ministers. Joseph Ruggles Wilson and Jessie Woodrow were married on June 7, 1849, at Chillicothe, Ohio, by the bride's father, the Reverend Dr. Thomas Woodrow.

### III. THE WOODROWS

The Woodrows were a remarkable family—a more distinguished stock, so far as the record shows, than the Wilsons, and though of Scotch origin, and with the Scotch traits, quite different in temperamental emphasis. They were not so bold, adventurous, gay; but steadier, more determined, more studious. If less showy and brilliant than the Wilsons, they were the kind who could “hold the long purpose like a growing tree,” and if devoted to traditions and to institutions, they could be adamant in their dissent from a creed or a dogma once they had become convinced of its error.

Woodrow Wilson's maternal grandfather, the Reverend Dr. Thomas Woodrow, came to America in 1836—twenty-nine years after his paternal grandfather, James Wilson. No branch of Woodrow Wilson's family goes back into colonial or even revolutionary times in America. No President of the United States, with one exception, had a briefer American background than Woodrow Wilson.<sup>1</sup>

The Woodrows, or Wodrows, as the name was spelled

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Jackson's father and mother migrated from Carrickfergus, Ireland, in 1765.

in Scotland, were an ancient family distinguished for scholarship in almost every generation for five hundred years. There was intermarriage with some of the great names of Scotland, and one branch, tradition says, traces back to Robert Bruce. Two of its most famous men of the earlier times were Professor James Wodrow of Glasgow University, who was born in 1637, and his equally famous son, the Reverend Robert Wodrow, born in 1679, author of *The Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, an original edition of which, with tattered bindings, bearing the name of that John Witherspoon who signed the Declaration of Independence, is now in the library at Princeton University.

This Robert Wodrow, "Minister of the Gospel at Eastwood," who must have been a man of prodigious industry, wrote a biography of his father in which he set forth the early history of the Wodrow family, reaching back into the Sixteenth Century.<sup>1</sup>

It appears that the earliest known progenitor "before the blessed reformation" was "Mr. Patrick Wodrow, a popish priest" who "wanted not the learning of that age." He had "one of the fairest and most beautiful hands in writing that I believe was in that time. . . . This Mr. Patrick was married to Agness Hamilton, daughter to a brother of the house of Abercorn," and held a church near Glasgow.

His descendants for many generations were men of substance and learning. Robert, his grandson, a lawyer, born 1600, was held "in very great reputation in that country for his piety, probity, and more than ordinary knowledge of Scotch law and practicks."

"No man in his station ever took more care of his children, or was at more expense in their education than this good man, reckoning what was this way bestowed, was the part of their patrimony which was best employed."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Published by Blackwood of Edinburgh in 1828.

Professor James Wodrow, the son of Robert, born January 2, 1637, was a remarkable man, a scholar in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, a powerful preacher, a learned professor, who maintained his stout Presbyterianism in the face of much persecution.

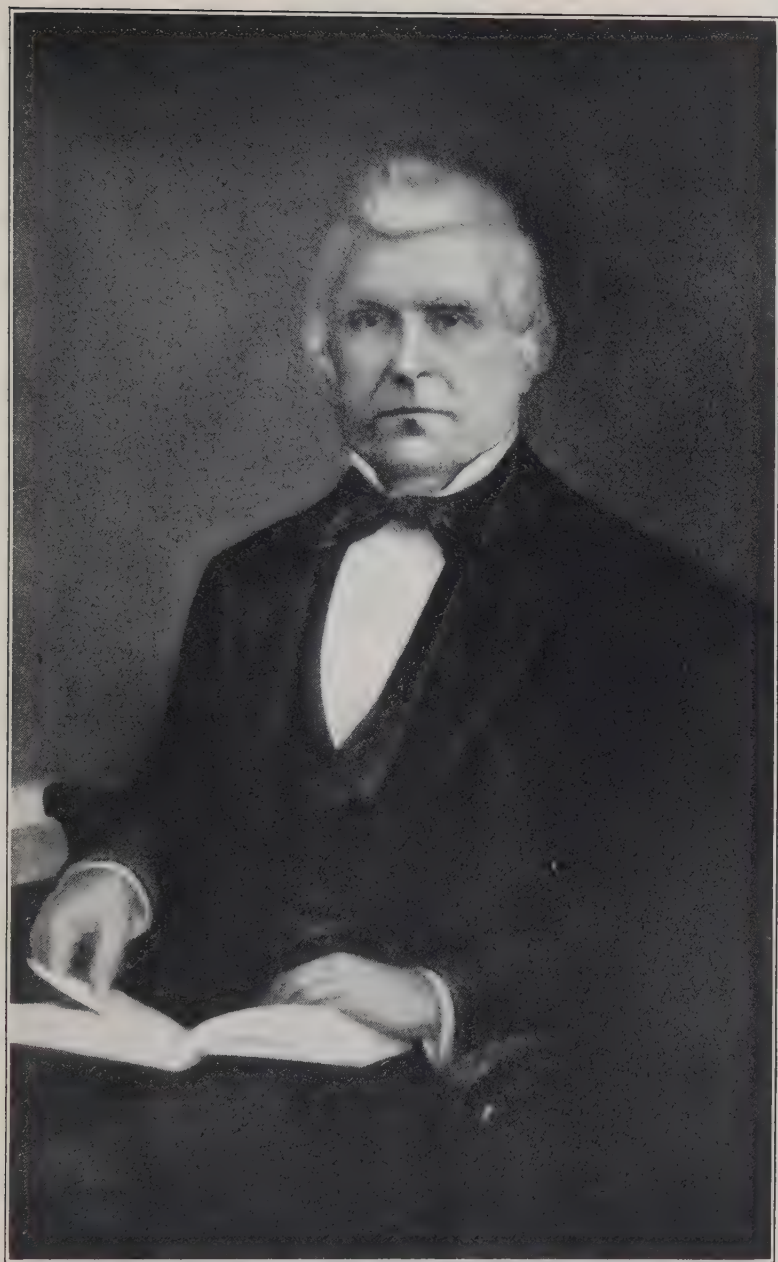
"God made him eminent in upbuilding his church in Scotland in a momentous age. He trained more than six hundred young men for the ministry. He had the principal part in formulating and in leading the church of Scotland to adopt the polity and discipline."

Woodrow Wilson's great-grandfather, John Wodrow, born in 1765, was a "ruling elder," a maker of Paisley shawls. He had a family of seven children, Thomas, the third son, born March 15, 1793, being Woodrow Wilson's grandfather.

Thomas Wodrow was a scholar in the good old groundings of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, with a thorough discipline in the severest learning of Scotch Presbyterianism. He grew up in Paisley and was educated at Glasgow University, finishing at the famous Theological Academy there. In February, 1820, he was called to be minister of the Annetwell Street Congregational Church in Carlisle, England. He was the first Wodrow of that line in five hundred years to leave Scotland: and when he crossed the border he changed the spelling of his name from Wodrow to Woodrow to accord with the English pronunciation. He took with him his bride, Marion Williamson, a few years his elder, and herself a descendant of a Scotch family which traced its origins back to the Highlands.

The Reverend Thomas Woodrow was the successful pastor of the Carlisle Church for fifteen years—largely increasing its membership. During that time, eight children were born to the family, of whom Janet, December 20, 1826, Woodrow Wilson's mother, was the fifth, and James, who was to become one of the great scholars of





JAMES WILSON  
WOODROW WILSON'S GRANDFATHER





the Southern Presbyterian Church, was the sixth. The house where Thomas Woodrow lived, not now standing, was in Annetwell Street, next door to the chapel. When Janet Woodrow was a child of five years, the thrifty father bought a bit of land from the Duke of Devonshire, in Warwick Road, where he built a house—which is still standing<sup>1</sup>—and kept a school to eke out his meagre earnings as a minister. Here he lived with his family until he left for America.

Woodrow Wilson took a deep interest in his Woodrow ancestry. On the first trip he made to Europe, in 1896, he visited Carlisle but failed to find his grandfather's church. On a later visit, he wrote:

"I think that this time I have at least found the locality of the house, under the castle walls, in which dear mother was born. The town must have changed a great deal in these eighty (?) years and I have little to go by, but I feel pretty sure of the general locality. There are only two places where houses *could* stand with their gardens running behind them to the castle wall, as she used to tell me theirs did. Uncle James, she remembered, used to play hand-ball against the wall of the castle itself, at the back of their garden."<sup>2</sup>

But his great visit to Carlisle was on December 29, 1918,

<sup>1</sup>Number 83.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, July 13, 1908. A tablet has been placed in the church bearing the following inscription:

The Mother of  
Thomas Woodrow Wilson,  
PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES of AMERICA  
was born in Carlisle. Her Father,  
The Revd. Thomas Woodrow, M. A.  
was Minister of this Church, then  
worshipping in Annetwell Street,  
from February 1820 to June 1835.

This Tablet is placed here to commemorate  
President Woodrow Wilson's "Pilgrimage of  
the Heart" to this Church, 29th December 1918.

when he was President of the United States, and, at the moment, the most renowned man in the world. He visited the church, now on Lowther Street, and was called upon to speak. It was a dramatic and affecting incident which will be treated in its appropriate place.

On November 10, 1835, Woodrow Wilson's grandfather, the Reverend Thomas Woodrow, with his wife and little flock of children, the oldest only fifteen and the youngest not yet three, sailed from Liverpool in a packet ship. It was a terrible voyage which Woodrow Wilson's mother, then a girl of nine, remembered to her dying day, and always with a dread of the sea. It was her influence that prevented her son "Tommy," years later, from following an impulse of his boyhood and going to sea. The voyage lasted more than two months—they reached New York January 12, 1836—in the dead of winter. There were continual and terrific storms, so that, after sighting the shores of Newfoundland, they were blown back until they could again see the Irish coast.

The voyage was too much for the anxious wife and mother, and five weeks after landing in New York, February 16, 1836, while her husband was away preaching at Poughkeepsie, she died there.

The desolate family, mothered now by a sister of the dead wife, Isabella Williamson, who had accompanied the family from England, soon emigrated to Brockville, Canada, to "endeavour to raise a congregation."

Brockville proved too cold and bleak, and in the next year the family removed to Chillicothe, Ohio, where Dr. Woodrow became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. Here he continued for twelve years, and here the family, including Woodrow Wilson's mother, grew up.

Dr. Woodrow made so notable a success as a pulpit orator, and his reputation for learning was so great, that he was called to the pastorate of the Hogg Presbyterian

Church of Columbus, Ohio, where he remained until his death, April 27, 1877—the year Woodrow Wilson was a sophomore at Princeton. In the history of the Chillicothe Presbytery, there is this comment upon Dr. Woodrow:

“[He] was a fine scholar, a good preacher, and especially powerful in prayer. He was conservative in his views and thoroughly Presbyterian in his belief. His sermons were always instructive and pointed. He loved to dwell on the great cardinal doctrines of the Gospel and to proclaim them in their simplicity and fulness.”

Woodrow Wilson had many vivid memories of his grandfather Woodrow. He was strongly Scotch and, especially when moved, spoke with a decided Scottish accent. His grandson delighted in telling stories about him. He was small of stature but extremely vigorous. On one occasion, he came to preach in the great church at Augusta, of which Woodrow Wilson's father was the pastor. He had forgotten his spectacles, and Dr. Wilson asked the congregation to help supply the defect. The little boy in the fourth pew down below never forgot the exciting and wholly non-ecclesiastical energy of his grandfather, there in the pulpit, trying on spectacles, nor afterward, the fascination of watching the borrowed spectacles, which were a size or so too large, slip gradually down the speaker's nose to the very verge of disaster, only to be dashed back again to safety, and with never a moment's interruption in the swift-flowing discourse.

It is not too much to say that these Woodrows had a passion for education. It was in their very blood. Theirs was a large family, and poor as only a minister's family can be poor. And they were in a new country; but this did not stop them. Strong family feeling bound them together, and they helped one another.

Especial mention of Professor James Woodrow may prove valuable here, because his character and tempera-

ment are interpretive of the Woodrow side of Woodrow Wilson, and because the man himself through all the earlier years was a light and exemplar for the youth who was to become President. Many references in Woodrow Wilson's letters, and elsewhere, testify to his admiration for his uncle:

"Ellen's letter brought me the sad news of the death of my uncle, Dr. James Woodrow. No doubt she has told you of it. That takes away the last of that generation in my family, on both sides of the house,—except a sister of my father's whom I have never seen. It takes away, besides, one of the noblest men I ever knew. A man of many small failings, I am glad, for my own comfort, to remember, but a man made to love (in the quiet, self-contained Scottish fashion, but very, very deeply, none the less) and to be loved, and gifted in an extraordinary degree with the powers that make a great thinker and a great man of science. He followed duty to obscure places and kept himself in mere faithfulness from the eye of fame; but his friends and intimates knew him for a man who might have placed his name among the great names of our men of learning. It pleases me to think of the gracious and helpful influences he has brought into the lives of many generations of students, and not least into the life of a nephew who never told him how much he owed to him."<sup>1</sup>

James Woodrow, like Joseph R. Wilson, who was early his friend, was graduated from Jefferson College at the head of his class, in 1849. He became a teacher of science in Alabama and attended Harvard College (in 1853), studying under Agassiz. Here, like many another student of those glowing years when Darwin's *Origin of Species* was the talk of the world, he was fired to a further study of

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Professor John Grier Hibben, January 26, 1907.



science and went to Heidelberg, where he took his doctor's degree in 1856, *summa cum laude*. He returned to Oglethorpe University, where he remained until chosen professor in the Columbia Theological Seminary in 1861. One of his students at Oglethorpe was the poet Sidney Lanier, who declared late in life that Dr. Woodrow was "the strongest and most valuable stimulus of my youth." During the war, he served in the medical department of the Confederate army, afterward returning to the Columbia Theological Seminary. In 1891, he became president of South Carolina College. He was a great and inspiring teacher, a thorough scholar and scientist.

"As a man Dr. Woodrow was the most truthful human being I have ever known. He had a genius for reality and a passion for statements which accurately fitted the fact. His love for truth, his search for it, and his skill in expressing it in adequate forms were as much a moral and spiritual trait as a mental characteristic."<sup>1</sup>

"He was a man who was economical of his time, rarely visiting, aiming straight at what he wanted to do, and while generous and courteous to everyone, held himself always somewhat aloof."<sup>2</sup>

Many of the people who knew both the uncle and the nephew comment upon the likeness of the two men in many points of their character—the same unshaken determination of purpose once the mind was made up, the same instinctive aloofness. They will also tell you that Woodrow Wilson had the Woodrow eyes, very bright, clear blue, with a gleam in them.

As a professor of science, Dr. Woodrow taught the doctrine of evolution, because he believed its truth. He

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<sup>1</sup>From a chapter by the Reverend Dr. Thornton Whaling, p. 196, in *Dr. James Woodrow, Character Sketches and His Teachings*, by Miss Marion Woodrow.

<sup>2</sup>General W. A. Clark of Columbia, South Carolina, to the author.

maintained firmly and persistently that evolution was God's plan of creation. "God's work and God's word cannot contradict each other."

But the forces in the Church, since called Fundamentalist, gradually rose against him, and after a long controversy he demanded a trial by his Presbytery (in 1884). It was one of the famous church trials in our history. He was declared "not guilty," but the case being appealed and the attacks incessant, he was finally forced from his place in the Columbia Theological Seminary. He could have compromised, he could have "restated his thesis," or he could have won votes by making a strong personal appeal, but he did none of these things. He preferred to win or lose upon the merit of his cause. Throughout, he was supported by Dr. Joseph R. Wilson, and we know from the letters of Woodrow Wilson, in 1884 a student at Johns Hopkins, how strongly he sided with his uncle.

Dr. Woodrow continued active in religious work, publishing his Presbyterian journal, and later becoming also a successful business man, president of a bank, and one of the highly regarded citizens of South Carolina. At one time, after the close of the Civil War, when the state government was at its lowest ebb, he made a bid for the state printing, which had been done under the most wasteful of political methods. To the astonishment of everyone at the capitol, he secured it. There was great speculation as to whether he would run his presses on Sunday, as all the former printers had been forced to do by the exigencies of publication connected with the legislature. But the people were not long to be in doubt. At twelve o'clock on the first Saturday night, Dr. Woodrow turned out all the lights in his printing office and the shop remained closed until one o'clock Monday morning.

Such was the Woodrow stock: Scotch to the marrow, serious, reserved, with deep but disciplined emotions,

strong in its likes and dislikes, profoundly religious, but intellectual in its convictions—scholarly individualists, yet good citizens.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. WOODROW WILSON'S BIRTH: 1856

Woodrow Wilson was born on December 28, 1856. It was in the year that Buchanan was elected President of the United States, the year the Republican party made its first national campaign, the year the Dred Scott decision was in the brewing, and Kansas was "bleeding," the year in which Abraham Lincoln, rising leader in Illinois, received one hundred and ten votes in the convention for Vice President of the United States. He was born in the Old South, at Staunton, Virginia, a fact of which he spoke always with pride. "Sometimes a man's rootage means more than his leafage."

His parents, Joseph Ruggles Wilson and Jessie or Janet Woodrow, had been married seven years. They were both Northern. Their marriage had taken place at Chillicothe, Ohio, June 7, 1849, and a fortnight later the young professor had been ordained by the Ohio presbytery. For a time, he filled the pulpit of a small church at Chartiers in Pennsylvania, but he could not resist a further experience as a teacher, this time in the field he loved best of all, as "professor extraordinary of rhetoric" at his Alma Mater, Jefferson College. Later, he went on to Hampden-Sidney College in Virginia, to teach chemistry and the natural sciences.

On June 24, 1855, Dr. Wilson became pastor of the

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<sup>1</sup>The other members of the Woodrow family, Woodrow Wilson's uncles and aunt, were of unusual quality. Robert, the oldest, was a remarkable scholar but died in the early prime of life. He never married. Thomas, who was considered the head of the family, was a man of singular force and beauty of character, became a successful merchant, and contributed largely to the education of the younger members of the family. William went West, took up land, and accumulated quite a fortune. Marion, the youngest of the family, married James W. Bones, in whose home Woodrow Wilson spent many months of his boyhood.

First Presbyterian Church of Staunton, and presently moved into the Manse with his wife and two little girls Marion and Anne. Staunton was an old town with an interesting and even distinguished history. It became very early a trading outpost for the Virginia Colony in its contacts with the Indians. Admirably situated in a broad valley with trails leading both east and west and north and south, it was a natural stopping point for emigrants on their way to Kentucky, and it invited settlers from Pennsylvania and the North. The town always had a stir in it, with more than the ordinary variety of population. The aristocracy, from the beginning, was old Virginian, but it was plentifully mixed with Scotch-Irish and Pennsylvania German.

The Presbyterian Manse was on the hill at the corner of what is now Coalter and Frederick streets, a substantial, square brick building, painted white, with a roomy setting and a garden below. At the time it was built, in 1845, it must have been one of the notable houses of the town. From the little porch at the back, where Dr. Wilson often wrote his sermons, the minister could look across the valley, at that time nearly all open land, to the Presbyterian Church which stands upon the opposite hillside. It also was of brick, and imposing. For many years it has been used for the Mary Baldwin Seminary for girls, and the new church is located across the street.

According to the records, Mrs. J. R. Wilson united with the church on March 9, 1856, and the following December, the 28th, her older son was born "near midnight" in the large lower room of the Manse just at the left as one enters the front door. He was promptly named Thomas Woodrow, after his grandfather and his uncle. He must shortly have been baptized, but there is no record of it in the books of the church. The room where President Wilson was born, and indeed the house, has been little



changed in seventy years. Furniture is still in use that was there when the two little sisters and their mother watched over the baby boy, and the room and the house attract many visitors. Over the old marble mantel hangs a portrait of Woodrow Wilson with a draped American flag, and already there is a growing collection of relics relating to his early life.<sup>1</sup>

We have several vivid glimpses of the child, the best in a letter written by his mother to his grandfather Woodrow on April 27, 1857:

"Since the birth of our little son (who is now nearly four months old) I have had very little leisure for writing until within the last month. . . . The boy is a fine healthy fellow—He is much larger than either of the others were—and just as fat as he can be. Everyone tells us, he is a *beautiful* boy—What is best of all, he is just as *good* as he can be—as little trouble as it is possible for a baby to be—You may be sure, Joseph is very proud of his fine little son—though he used to say daughters were so much sweeter than sons. . . . Our boy is named '*Thomas Woodrow*'. . . ."

We have also a letter written to Woodrow Wilson by his aunt, Mrs. James Woodrow, on his birthday, December 28, 1914, when he was President of the United States:

"MY DEAR TOMMY:

"It has often been in my heart to write you a short note to let you know how intensely interested I am in all that affects you, and how my sympathies are always with you.

"For the last few days, however, I have been thinking more especially of the first time I saw you. I was being

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<sup>1</sup>A sundial near the corner of the building bears this inscription: "Birthplace of Woodrow Wilson, 1856, 28th President of the United States of America. Erected by the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Virginia."

An organization has been formed headed by the energetic minister, the Reverend A. M. Fraser, who now occupies the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church, to purchase and preserve the Manse as the "Woodrow Wilson Birthplace Memorial."



introduced to the family as the 'new Aunt,' when you were brought, and I was told 'This is Tommy.' I looked up and saw a lovely, fair Baby, about seven months old, in a white dress and blue ribbons.

"How little I thought then, that I was being introduced to a future President of the United States!

"In spite of all your greatness and high position, you have always been 'Tommy' to me."

Another reference is from a letter which Woodrow Wilson received in 1902 from an old friend of the family:

"I remember you distinctly as an infant of a few months old, very plump and fat and remarkably quiet. Dr. Woodrow said to me once: 'that baby is dignified enough to be Moderator of the General Assembly!'"

In commenting upon this, Wilson remarked to his wife: "What do you think of that as an example of a remarkably early case of 'feeling one's oats'?"<sup>1</sup>

The restless and brilliant Dr. Wilson remained at Staunton only two years and a half. In November, 1857, he became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Augusta, Georgia. His family followed him a month or two later. The child Tommy, was, therefore, only a year old when the family left Virginia.

Such were Woodrow Wilson's origins: tough Scotch and Scotch-Irish stock, intellectual men trained in the severe school of the Presbyterian ministry, his own birth in Virginia, the "mother of Presidents." No doubt his heredity accounts for much in his character and career, but his early environment and his education were even more distinctive. Wilson himself was one of the last men to underrate the influence of blood, and yet he had a profound conviction, deepened by his training as an educator, in the influence of early environment and the power of a

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<sup>1</sup>Letter of July 20, 1902.

man to determine his own destiny. He remarked in an address in 1909 on Robert E. Lee:

“After all, what makes and distinguishes a man is not that he is derived from any family or from any training, but that he has discovered for himself the true rôle of manhood in his own day.”<sup>1</sup>

But it is only fine metal that will take high tempering. The metal was there, what of the tempering?

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<sup>1</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. II, p. 66. ,

## CHAPTER II

### BOYHOOD IN GEORGIA

1858-1870

The child is absorbed by no interest, makes no barter for leave to live, but stands upon a place apart, a little spectator of the world, before whom men and women come and go, events fall out, years open their slow story and are noted or let go as his mood chances to serve them. The play touches him not. He but looks on, thinks his own thought, and turns away, not even expecting his cue to enter the plot and speak. He waits,—he knows not for what. The days tell upon him like rain and air and the succession of the seasons, and seem long, very long, to his dreaming senses.

*Baccalaureate Address at Princeton University,  
June 12, 1904.*

For rigorous masters seized my youth,  
And purged its faith, and trimmed its fire,  
Shew'd me the high, white star of truth,  
There bade me gaze, and there aspire.

*Matthew Arnold.*

#### I. THE FAMILY

**M**Y EARLIEST recollection is of standing at my father's gateway in Augusta, Georgia, when I was four years old, and hearing someone pass and say that Mr. Lincoln was elected and there was to be war. Catching the intense tones of his excited voice, I remember running in to ask my father what it meant."<sup>1</sup>

Politics and war were thus in the awakening consciousness, the earliest remembrance, of the little boy whose name fifty-two years afterward was likewise to be heard upon the lips of passers-by in little towns, and later linked with the fortunes of an even greater war.

<sup>1</sup>Address on Abraham Lincoln, February 12, 1909. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. II, p. 83.

It was a shady street in a comfortable, settled, somewhat aristocratic town that the little boy lived in: the heart of the Old South. It had already an ancient tradition, having been one of the early interior settlements of the Georgia colony, for it was at the head of navigation of the Savannah River. All about were fine plantations of cotton and corn with the comfortable homes of the planters and clustering quarters of Negro slaves. Half the population of the town, then about sixteen thousand, was coloured. It was near Augusta that Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, and there were still, in Woodrow Wilson's boyhood, vivid stories of how General Lafayette had visited the town in 1825 and ridden through the streets accompanied by gaily uniformed hussars. Its ancient aristocratic church was St. Paul's Episcopal, standing with fine dignity upon the bank of the river, but for numbers and vitality the First Presbyterian Church was the great centre of religious life. It stood in a spacious, shady square in the heart of the town: a solid brick building with a square tower and a white spire. To be the minister of such a church in such a city in such a time was to be named with senators and generals and judges: a marked man, a leader. Woodrow Wilson's father, Dr. Joseph Ruggles Wilson, was that minister.

It was in the Manse that the boy lived; and the Manse stood on the corner diagonally across from the church. The house bore itself with the distinction and solidity befitting its position. It stood somewhat removed from the street, with sheltering trees around it—"fifty feet of self-respect"—a substantial brick building with a chimney at each end. A wall ran behind to screen a bit of garden, and there was a brick stable where the minister kept his big black horse. The stable had a loft above, reached by a ladder upon the wall, where the boy Wilson addressed his first congress and devised his first covenant.

It was into the broad central hall of the Manse that the little boy ran on that far-away day of Lincoln's election. To the right was the parlour—the formal parlour—with its prim furniture, some of it purchased by the Wilsons in 1859 or 1860, and still in use. To the left was the minister's study, which remains to this day much as it was in Dr. Wilson's time. The boy's own room was at the top of the stairs at the back overlooking the areaway; a large cool room with a high ceiling.

The minister's study was walled about with books, books of all kinds, for Dr. Wilson was a true lover of the printed word. Long afterward, Woodrow Wilson recalled the impression of that book-lined study. "The very odour of books"—it clung to him all his life! There must also have been an equally pervasive odour of tobacco in the study, for the Doctor was a prodigious smoker. He loved especially a long-stemmed pipe with a clay bowl.<sup>1</sup> Once, when the President was asked why he had never smoked, he replied:

"My father did enough of it in his lifetime to answer for both of us."

To be running in to his father was the most natural thing in the boy's life. His father was the greatest figure of his youth—perhaps the greatest of his whole life. "My incomparable father." Until after he was forty years old, Woodrow Wilson never made an important decision of any kind without first seeking his father's advice. A great love bound them together—love, and admiration, and profound respect.

"I have never seen filial affection and regard equal to that of Mr. Wilson for his father," writes Professor Winthrop M. Daniels, who knew the family intimately in the days of the Princeton professorship. "It is hard to say whether genuine admiration for the father's ability or un-

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph R. Wilson, Jr., to the author.



bounded affection for the man himself was the stronger ingredient in this dominant passion.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Wilson was an extraordinary man. A person—a notability. He was not only a fine preacher—he preached in Beecher’s pulpit and in Talmage’s—but he was a scholar, a wit, a gentleman. He was a large man, powerful, full-bodied and square, though not quite as tall as his son. According to everyone who remembers him, he was an unusually handsome man, his head crowned with a great shock of hair which he tossed back from his broad forehead. In later years, it turned, not white in the ordinary way, but a silky, sea-island cotton white with a yellow tinge in it. A thing to mark! His earlier portraits show him with whiskers at the sides of his face and beneath his chin but not obscuring the fine firm lines of his face. His eyes were brown and piercing bright, full of fire. He had the distinctive Wilson nose, long and straight, with a flexible tip, especially marked during animated conversation. His son inherited this unusual characteristic. But above all—the sum of all—he had an indescribable quality of presence.

“If I had my father’s face and figure,”<sup>2</sup> Woodrow Wilson once remarked, “it wouldn’t make any difference what I said.”<sup>1</sup>

He was a distinguished figure in any company. He was courtly, as became a Southern gentleman, he had a gift of repartee that was often devastating. His joking and teasing sometimes left barbs in the wounds he made.

There was nothing solemn about this Presbyterian minister of Augusta. He could be a fine and gay companion for a boy. A story comes down to us—though of a later year, yet interpretive of the relationship of father and son—of a wild game of tag between the two, which started in the study and tumbled out into the garden, with the little boy dodging around corners and behind trees and

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs. Harriet Woodrow Welles to the author.

the heavy man, with astonishing agility, in full pursuit. Finally, the boy, hard pressed, attempted to climb the fence and was nabbed by the leg.

"I've caught him, the young rascal, I've caught him," exclaimed the Doctor triumphantly to the other members of the family, who had come running out to see the fun.<sup>1</sup>

He loved also to play games, chess, and billiards particularly, but not cards. His son Tommy learned to play chess poorly and was never a match for the stout old minister, but in billiards he could sometimes master him.

The boy's mother was more sedate and reserved, with a firmer knit texture of character. She had received a better formal education than most of the women of her day. As a girl, she made a strong impression upon those who knew her. It was not so much beauty, certainly not prettiness, though she had the charm of remarkably fine gray eyes and sunny curls, as it was the sense of vivid life she gave.

Underneath the reserve upon which everyone comments who knew her, she was a woman of strong religious feeling, deep-seated and serious, yet touched with poetry. Among the yellowing treasures preserved by the President is a poem written (or possibly transcribed) by his mother while a student at the Southern Tennessee Seminary, July 27, 1847, and signed "Jeanie E. Woodrow of Chillicothe, O." It was sent as "Best Wishes," perhaps to the gay young schoolmaster of Steubenville, Ohio, whom she was to marry two years later. Here is the first stanza:

*Best Wishes*

Thine be the love,—refined from sense,—  
That seeks its object in the skies  
Drains all its warmth and brightness thence,  
Its comfort, confidence, and joys:  
And be thy best affections given  
*To him who loved thee first in heaven.—*

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<sup>1</sup>James Wilson Woodrow to the author.



WOODROW WILSON'S MOTHER, JESSIE WOODROW WILSON



"Aunt Jeanie was a typical gentlewoman, delicate, refined, quiet, and dignified in manner, but with a firm Scotch character and will. She was very domestic, loved her home and family, and always had beautiful flowers."<sup>1</sup>

She was truly Scotch, deep in her affections, independent in her convictions, capable of strong indignation. And proud! It is related that, when the family went to Augusta, some of the ladies, with characteristic helpfulness, sent in little gifts of preserves, a basket of fruit, or the like, but they soon had the feeling that this sort of thing hurt the pride of the minister's wife.

"Oh, she was independent," said one whose memory reaches back to those times. "She had her pride. You know, she was English."<sup>2</sup>

Her letters to her brothers, and especially those to her son, are full of the deepest love and solicitude. She was one who was anxious of affection and full of hidden sympathy.

"Have you received your desk & b. case yet?" she wrote, once, after her son left home. "Did you find your shirts a good fit? . . . Is there anything else you would like to have sent? . . . Do *take care of yourself*. . . . God bless you, darling boy—You have never been anything but a comfort to me all your life!"<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, if one of her clan was injured, she could be indignant! In referring to the attacks upon her much-loved brother, Professor James Woodrow, for his views upon evolution, she speaks of the "insolent attacks of the ignorant & malicious men who have assailed" him, and continues ". . . I cannot express my indignation—my impotent anger—at what I read. . . . O how *ashamed* I feel for our church! . . . I believe our Southern church

<sup>1</sup>Mrs. Harriet Woodrow Welles to the author.

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. E. F. Verdery to the author.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Woodrow Wilson, June 13, 1882.



will not be left to the mercy of these wicked men—who are actuated by envy & malice only.”

Certain characteristics appear in all these letters of the Wilsons and the Woodrows. They are to the last line full of vigour and conviction. They are the letters of highly cultivated people of strong character and clear ideas. All of them, but especially the letters of the Woodrows, are beautiful and accurate in their penmanship, and one may look far indeed to find an error in composition or a misspelled word. Another characteristic which appears in the family correspondence, and this is especially true in Mr. Wilson's own family, is the extreme warmth of address used by one member of the family to another. “Dearest Joseph,” “My precious son,” “My beloved father,” “Darling boy.”

Years later, at a time when the President was labouring under the burden of the European war, he wrote to the Reverend William J. Hampton:

“It is very hard for me to speak of what my mother was without colouring the whole estimate with the deep love that fills my heart whenever I think of her. But while others cannot have seen her as I did, I am sure that everyone who knew her at all, must have felt also the charm of her unusual grace and refinement, and have been aware of the clear-eyed, perceiving mind that lay behind her frank, gray eyes. They were not always gray. They were of that strange, changeable colour, which so often goes with strong character and varied ability. She was one of the most remarkable persons I have ever known. She was so reserved, that only those of her own household can have known how lovable she was, though every friend knew how loyal and steadfast she was. I seem to feel still the touch of her hand, and the sweet steadying influence of her wonderful character. I thank God to have had such a mother!”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>September 13, 1917.

His deep feeling for his mother is also expressed in a letter which he wrote from Clarksville, Tennessee, at the time of her death:

"... the home of my whole life broken up forever—father's home gone—the house standing, within a block of where I sit writing, closed, empty, desolate: because my precious mother is dead....

"As the first shock and acute pain of the great, the irreparable blow passes off, my heart is filling up with tenderest memories of my sweet mother, memories that seem to hallow my whole life.... I remember how I clung to her (a laughed-at 'mamma's boy') till I was a great big fellow: but love of the best womanhood came to me and entered my heart through those apron-strings. If I had not lived with such a mother I could not have won and seemed to deserve—in part, perhaps, deserved, through transmitted virtues—such a wife...."<sup>1</sup>

It was thus a rarely devoted, loyal, and cultivated family in which the boy Tommy Wilson grew up. There were two older sisters, Marion, six years, and Anne, two years, his senior. His younger brother, Joseph Ruggles Jr., was not born until after the Civil War; he was ten years Woodrow Wilson's junior. While there was often company in the house—for it was not only a Southern home, but a minister's home, and Dr. Wilson dearly loved a tableful of friends and relatives—yet the impression we have from letters and many reminiscences is that there was a holy of holies, a place of retirement, where the family could meet and read and sing and pray. It was a family much given to reading aloud. While some of the books were serious, there were also novels, books of travel and poetry—"anything good." Dickens was then the joy of the world. We catch glimpses of the family sitting together, the mother characteristically erect in

<sup>1</sup>To Ellen Axson Wilson, April 19, 1888.

her chair, knitting, the two sisters side by side, and the little boy Tommy flat on his back on the floor while the doctor read aloud with vast delight from *Pickwick Papers* or from Scott's novels. The Doctor himself, we are told, liked to sit on the floor while he read, with his back to an upturned chair. He had a fine resonant bass voice which he played upon as though it were a delicate instrument, to suit every emotion. The boy Tommy never forgot the sound of it nor how his father's laughter would ring out when he came upon some particularly delicious passage.

Every day there were prayers: the reading of the Word, and all the family kneeling while the minister talked with God. On Sunday evenings before the lamps were lighted, and often at other times, they would sing together some of the great old hymns, just voices, for there was no instrument in the house. The boy Tommy later developed a fine tenor, and delighted all his life to sing—especially the older songs. He was a member of the Glee Club at Johns Hopkins, and sang with his own daughters at Princeton; and occasionally in the White House, even in the years of his greatest burdens, he would spend a half hour at evening, singing.

When both father and mother were busy, the older sisters often read aloud. The boy Tommy himself was backward—"lazy" he called himself. He did not even learn his letters until he was nine years old: and could not read readily until he was eleven. What need was there when a boy could spend such hours in delightful listening while others read aloud? He loved always the spoken word, the roll of language. Years later, in answer to a query as to his favourite fairy story, he wrote:

"The truth is that I was so voracious of fairy tales when I was a small boy, that I loved them all almost equally well. . . . All was grist that came to my mill."

One of the first books that he himself read—probably

the first—was Weems's *Life of Washington*, a book that was also an early inspiration to Abraham Lincoln. He said in an address while Governor of New Jersey:

"When I was a very young child, when I could hardly read, there fell into my hands a book, which perhaps few of the youngest members of the Senate have had occasion to see, that was entitled *The Life of Washington*, by Weems. I recall having thought even then, child as I was, that something doubtless more than common must have been possessed by that cause for which our fathers fought."

It was thus a house of books, an environment of serious thought, an atmosphere of deep family devotion in which the boy grew up.

## II. EARLY EDUCATION

The boy Tommy Wilson had no systematic early education. Even after the war closed, his parents seemed in no hurry to send him to school, though he was then more than eight years old. He was somewhat slow of development. But this does not mean that he was not learning, and learning in the best of all possible ways, by contact with cultivated minds, and the constant instruction of parents who were devotedly interested in his progress.

It was a common sight in the town to see the handsome Doctor, in his black ministerial coat, walking out with his son on a Monday or Tuesday after the strain of a Presbyterian Sabbath was past, to visit a cotton gin, or a corn mill, or after the war was in full swing, to see the iron foundries or the ammunition plants. Each process was carefully explained, and upon returning home the boy and his father would talk over the whole experience, the minister with his love of language insisting that every description, every idea, be expressed completely in perfect English. He never permitted the use of an incorrect word or sentence. If there was any doubt, the boy was



sent flying for the dictionary, and there was often great discussion of the exact meaning of a word or a phrase. Years later, in his own family at Princeton, we catch a glimpse of Professor Wilson getting up from the dinner table to bring the dictionary.

"What do you mean by that?" the Doctor would ask the boy when he fumbled a sentence.

Tommy would explain.

"Then why don't you say so?"

He made the same searching inquiries to find out whether the boy understood the books that were read aloud to him, and later the books he himself read. The Doctor believed that there could be no clear thought without clear expression. And back of clear thought lay accurate observation, the activity of an alert mind. An idea must not be left ragged at the edges, every word must do its definite work, every sentence must be clear.

"The best teacher I ever had used to say to me:

"When you frame a sentence don't do it as if you were loading a shotgun, but as if you were loading a rifle. Don't fire in such a way and with such a load that while you hit the thing you aim at you will hit a lot of things in the neighbourhood besides; but shoot with a single bullet and hit that one thing alone."<sup>1</sup>

As the boy grew older, the Doctor, who knew well the best in literature, would read aloud some passage from a favourite author—he loved Charles Lamb—and he and Tommy would then set to work to pick it apart and see whether the concepts it contained could be better expressed in some other way. They tried, at one time, Daniel Webster's orations, seeking to improve the expression, or reduce them into shorter compass without robbing them either of ideas or of eloquence.

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<sup>1</sup>Address before the High School Teachers' Association in New York City, January 9, 1909.



"But," as the President said years later, "we never got far with Daniel."

The Doctor's love of words was sometimes carried to extremes, to pedantry or puns. "I wonder with great admiration." Once, at the deathbed of a parishioner at Wilmington, he remarked to the little boy who stood at his side, an expression the boy never forgot:

"He has no speculation in his eyes."<sup>1</sup>

He was also a nimble-witted punster, sometimes in his later years quite mercilessly so. "He talked too much."

The Doctor had a horror of pouring into a youthful mind a mass of indigestible facts. One could read too much just as he could eat too much. Long afterward, Woodrow Wilson put the essence of his father's teaching into an address at Pittsburgh.

"The knowledge you supply to the little fellow in the home is not merely conveyed to him in order that he may be full; the knowledge that is supplied to him in school is not put in him as if he were merely a little vessel to be filled to the top. My father, who was a very plain-spoken man, used to use a phrase which was rough, but it expressed the meaning exactly. He said, 'My son, the mind is not a prolix gut to be stuffed.' That is not the object of it. It is not a vessel made to contain something; it is a vessel made to transmute something. The process of digestion is of the essence, and the only part of the food that is of any consequence is the part that is turned into blood and fructifies the whole frame. And so with knowledge. All the wise saws and prudent maxims and pieces of information that we supply to the generation coming on are of no consequence whatever in themselves unless they get into the blood and are transmuted."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>President Edwin A. Alderman to the author.

<sup>2</sup>Address before the Pennsylvania State Sabbath School Association, October 13, 1904. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 478-479.

These were ideas that became root principles with the future president of Princeton. Throughout his life, Woodrow Wilson was recalling sapient sayings of his father.

"My father used to say there is no use trying to reason out of a man's mind what reason did not put into it."<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to resist the temptation to enlarge upon this rare and fine relationship, which was not only that of father and son but of Master and Scholar in the old sense. The Doctor was confident of the great future of his son long before he had begun to rise in the world. They loved to be together: and their letters were full of the deepest affection. The son planned his vacations so that he could see as much as possible of his father. "... it is both education and pleasure to be with him—and to help him, as I have usually done, in the preparation of the Assembly's *Minutes*. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

The letters between the two can be called nothing but love letters. Here is part of one from Dr. Wilson written in 1889 while his son, who was a professor at Wesleyan, was lecturing at Johns Hopkins:

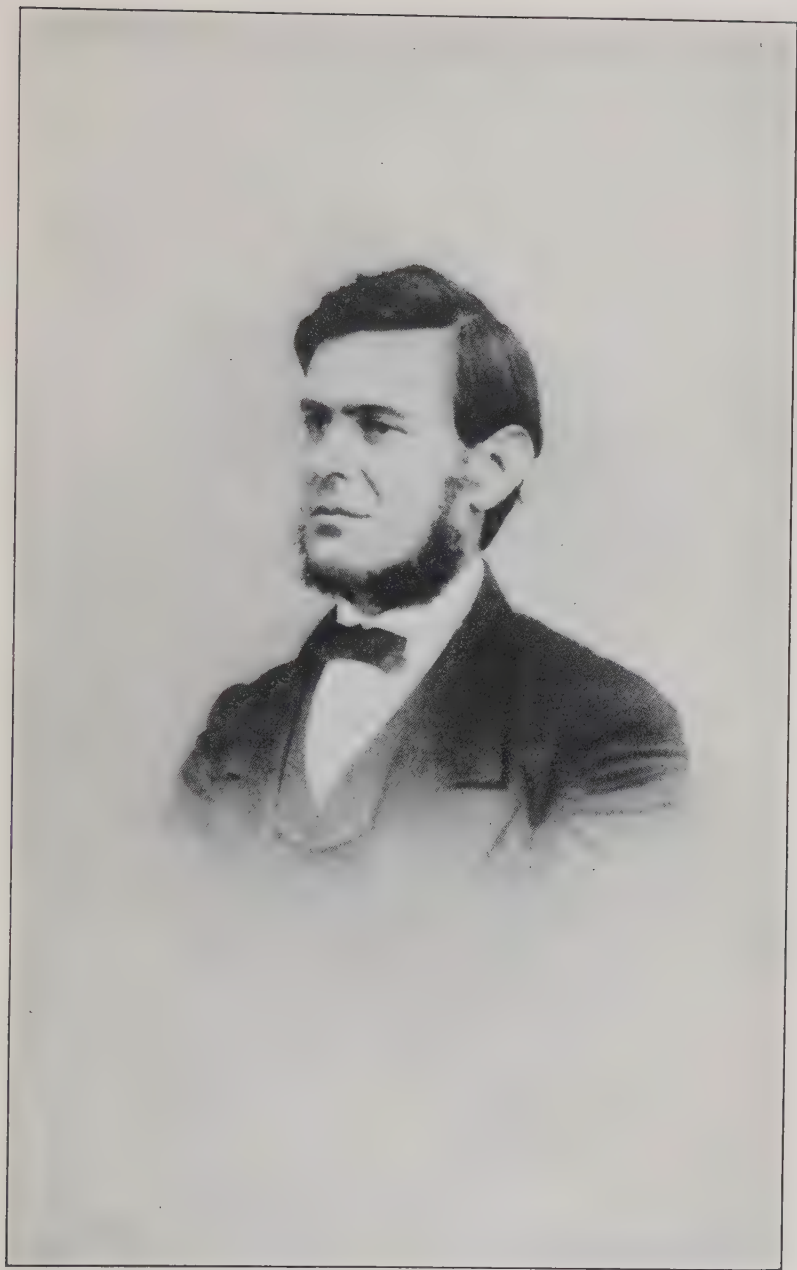
"Clarksville, Tenn. Mar. 6, '89

"MY PRECIOUS SON—

"Your most welcome letter came to hand on yesterday. I would have written you, as a break to the long silence, had I been sure of your address—but it was not known in this part of earth whether you were in M. or in B. There is one thing always sure, however, and this is that you are hour by hour in my thoughts and upon my heart:—and what is just as certain is, that you deserve the place which you occupy within the house of my soul, and even a bigger

<sup>1</sup>Address before the High School Teachers' Association in New York City, January 9, 1909.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, March 23, 1884. For years young Wilson edited the records of the Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church of which his father was Permanent Clerk.



WOODROW WILSON'S FATHER  
THE REV. DR. JOSEPH RUGGLES WILSON



place were it a bigger soul. How, in my solitude, have I longed for the presence of that dear son in whose large love I trust so implicitly and in the wealth of whose gem-furnished mind I take such delight: him in whom my affections centre as my child, and my confidences as my friend.

"I can readily sympathize with you in the satisfaction you experience in getting back to Johns Hopkins once more, where intellectual life rolls its highest waves:—a satisfaction which is augmented by the fact that you are, yourself, a sort of magna pars where there is so much that is great. What would I not give to be in a position for hearing your lectures!—and to talk with you thereanent afterwards, perhaps, too, beforewards. I do not doubt as touching the impression they are making—and as you perceive this it must be very pleasing to your thoughts everyway. You are preaching a gospel of order, and thus of safety, in the department of political morals and conduct, such as has not heretofore been heralded, and success is therefore a personal gratification whilst it is also a public benefit. I feel *very* proud of you when I think of what you are doing and doing so well."

His three granddaughters remember once, while Dr. Wilson was ill at Princeton, how he sent for them to come to his room and, possibly thinking death near, remarked in a solemn and impressive voice:

"I want you three children to remember this. Your father is a very great man."<sup>1</sup>

While he did not live to know of the greatest honours that came to his son—he died in 1903—he would not have been in the least surprised at the outcome.

At the close of the Civil War, when the poverty-stricken soldiers of the Lost Cause had returned home to gather

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs. William G. McAdoo to the author.



up the broken fragments of their lives, a vigorous young Confederate officer whose name was Joseph T. Derry set up a private school in Augusta which Tommy soon began to attend. Among the pupils were several boys who afterward became famous—Joseph R. Lamar, a Justice of the United States Supreme Court; Pleasant Stovall, now editor and publisher of the *Savannah Press*, whom President Wilson appointed Minister to Switzerland; Thomas R. Gibson, later United States Consul at Beirut, Syria; and William A. Keener, afterward Dean of the Law School of Columbia University. It was a notable group of playmates that young Tommy Wilson had.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Derry's school was on the river bank not far from the Episcopal Church. The great cotton warehouses, favourite playgrounds, were near at hand—busy places during a great part of the school year. Each session of the school was opened with the reading of a Psalm, and the pupils, standing, repeated the Lord's Prayer. Professor Derry himself held the classes in Latin and history and Professor Pelot had the boys in writing and bookkeeping. Young Tommy Wilson's school work was decidedly below average.

"It was not because he was not bright enough, but because he was apparently not interested."

One incident of the years in Professor Derry's school remained vividly in the memories of both master and pupil, during all their lives. A circus came to town, and some of the boys of the school, including Tommy Wilson, played truant and followed the elephant. They knew, of

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Derry is still living (October, 1925, when the author talked with him) at Jacksonville, Florida. He was born December 13, 1841, at Milledgeville, Georgia. He served four years in the Confederate Army, conducted his famous school for boys at Augusta for fourteen years, was professor of languages and history in Wesleyan Female College at Macon, Georgia, for seventeen years, and afterward served in the Department of Agriculture of the State of Georgia. He is a distinguished-looking old gentleman, and, though now an invalid, he is still clear in mind and memory.

course, what the inevitable result would be, and on their way back to the school they stopped in a cotton warehouse and introduced cotton pads at the points where they might prove most useful. This, however, did not in the least mitigate the sound thrashing they received when they appeared. Professor Derry thinks he is the only man who ever whipped Woodrow Wilson. Many years later, he met the president of Princeton University, and Mr. Wilson himself referred to the incident and remarked that he had a "feeling recollection of it." Still later—a memory that lies warmly in the mind of the fine old schoolmaster—Professor Derry and his wife called upon the President in the White House.

"I shall never forget it; nor how the President's face lighted up when he saw me. He took both my hands in his and said, 'What an honour this is.'"

The boy's life at Augusta was not without the education, sometimes the best kind of education, which comes from boy life itself, boy adventure, boy organization, sport. His two nearest friends were Joe and Phil Lamar, sons of the Reverend James S. Lamar, who lived next door. Others were Pleasant Stovall and Will Fleming.<sup>1</sup> The Flemings lived on a plantation in the country, but they attended Dr. Wilson's church, and the families visited back and forth. A visit by the Wilsons meant an entire long delicious day in the country—driving out behind the big black horse, having dinner at the long table with the Flemings, roving about the plantation where the Negroes were at work, and returning in the cool of the evening. Sometimes Pleasant Stovall and Tommy Wilson would ride out to the Flemings' or to the home of the Bones family on horseback, Tommy, a strange, wiry little

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<sup>1</sup>William H. Fleming, now one of the foremost lawyers in Georgia, a former member of Congress, to whom the author is indebted for an account of many of these early incidents.

figure in spectacles, mounted on the minister's big horse, and his friend on a much livelier pony.

The Bones family—James W. Bones had married Marion Woodrow, a sister of the boy's mother—lived in the Sand Hills, now called Summerville. James W. Bones was superintendent of the Sunday school in Dr. Wilson's church. The older daughter of the family, Jessie Woodrow Bones,<sup>1</sup> though younger than Tommy, was a famous playmate. They read together Cooper's romances, especially the Indian stories, or rather he read to her, and afterward, with painted faces and feathers in their hair, they acted out the parts of their favourite heroes. Not far away in the pine woods was a small Negro settlement, and they would sometimes lie in wait to pounce upon unsuspecting little coloured boys who chanced to wander that way—dashing out with ready tomahawks and curling war whoops. Sometimes the little cousin, who was a rugged tomboy, had to serve as the prey of the bold Indian chief and be scalped or burned at the stake. Once, playing that she was a squirrel up a tree, the Indian hunter shot at her with his deadly bow and arrow. To his terrified amazement, she came tumbling to the ground at his feet. He carried the limp little body into the house, exclaiming: "I am a murderer. It wasn't an accident. I killed her."

"Mr. Bones's house stood next to the United States Arsenal, which, after the close of the war, was occupied by the Federal troops. Tommy and Jessie never tired of going to the guardhouse, at the entrance to the arsenal grounds, to look at the soldiers and talk with them. One day, however, Jessie's mother explained to her that those friends of theirs were Yankees and had fought against the South. It was a great blow to the couple, and they often discussed

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<sup>1</sup>Afterward Mrs. A. T. H. Brower, to whom the author is indebted for many of the facts herein set forth. A younger sister, Helen W. Bones, lived with President and Mrs. Wilson for a time in the White House.

the feasibility of converting the Yankees into Presbyterians—all good people being Presbyterians and all wicked ones Yankees.”<sup>1</sup>

We have also vivid glimpses of a club of boys which was organized by Tommy Wilson for various secret, mysterious, and adventurous purposes. They called it the “Lightfoot Club”—a name drawn straight out of Cooper. They played baseball, challenging other teams in the neighbourhood, and while Tommy Wilson was not one of the most skillful players, he was, none the less, the president of the club. He had a kind of wiry endurance and was extremely agile and light upon his feet. Years later, in college, we have a glimpse of him dancing a kind of hornpipe for the amusement of his classmates, and even in the White House he would sometimes take his exercise in this way.

The Lightfoot Club met in the loft of Dr. Wilson’s barn, among the “hills of hay.” It was lighted only by apertures through the brick wall high in the gables—just the place for boyish mysteries.<sup>2</sup> The chief decoration was a portrait in red of His Satanic Majesty, torn from an advertisement of devilled ham. Here Tommy, who presided, was in his element. He made a kind of constitution for the club, and all the debates were conducted strictly according to the rules of order. All his life long, as we shall see, he was drawing up constitutions for various organizations, and finally a covenant for the nations of the world. It was as natural for the boy Tommy Wilson to be interested in such an organization as this, and to be its leader, as it was to draw his breath. His father was not his teacher in this, nor Professor Derry; it did not even come out of his early reading: it was of the essence of the boy’s gift. How

<sup>1</sup>William Bayard Hale, *Woodrow Wilson*, p. 36. These and other incidents of his boyhood were related to Mr. Hale by Woodrow Wilson.

<sup>2</sup>The author climbed the ladder to look in at the loft where the Lightfoot Club had its meetings; only dust and cobwebs are left.



human beings could be organized, the best rules for holding them together, the way to lead such groups—these were the essential studies of the man's whole life.

### III. THE CHURCH

At the centre of the life of the Wilson family stood the Church. The Presbyterian Church with its stern doctrine, its veneration for Holy Writ, its profound sense of the presence and judgments of God, its emphasis upon the value of human personality.

The Church was always before the boy's eyes, literally and figuratively. There it stood, with its spaciousness, its dignity, its beauty—a power in the eyes of man. On summer evenings in his early boyhood, lying in his bed, the boy could hear through the open windows of his room the sweet cadences of voices singing hymns. He attended the services and the Sunday school as a matter of course. It was as inevitable a part of his life as his daily food. The pew where the Wilson family sat, reverently pointed out to the visitor of to-day, was the fourth from the high pulpit. The boy Tommy could look up into his father's face as he read sonorously from the great Bible.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Wilson's sermons were carefully prepared, sound substance finely expressed, and occasionally went quite over the heads of the audience. But the little boy there in the pew with his mother and his two older sisters never doubted that the magnificent minister was the greatest preacher in the world and the noblest man. Long afterward he wrote, referring to his father's preaching:

"I wish that I could believe that I had inherited that rarest gift of making great truths attractive in the telling and of inspiring with great purposes by sheer force of eloquence or by gentle stress of persuasion."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A Bible published in England in 1827 and still sometimes used in church services.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, October 23, 1883.



We have two singular glimpses of the boy Tommy Wilson there in the pew of the Presbyterian Church. One comes from his boyhood friend and playmate, Will Fleming, who, with his family, sat near the Wilson pew—one of those strange, vivid pictures that linger with us out of childhood. He said that he was suddenly impressed one Sunday morning by the head and profile of his playfellow, the size of the head, the strange sharpness of his nose and chin, and the fact that the boy wore spectacles. A vivid picture, never forgotten—indicative indeed of the stamp of personality and difference that the boy made even in those early years.

Another of these glimpses comes from a lady who was quite a number of years older than Woodrow Wilson.<sup>1</sup> Though a young girl at the time, she was an accomplished musician and was sometimes called upon to substitute for the organist. She soon discovered that the minister's boy, whom she thought shy and reserved, was peculiarly affected by music, and that when certain doleful selections were played, such as the hymn, "'Twas on that dark and doleful day," sung often at communion services, the little boy would sit crying.

He was not only shy, but sensitive and imaginative, no doubt easily hurt by the ineptitudes of a fumbling world of grown-ups. He himself has given an autobiographic glimpse of his own boyish life:

"Those who have read that delightful book of Kenneth Grahame's entitled *The Golden Age*, the age of childhood, will recall the indictment which he brings against the Olympians, as he calls them,—the grown-up people,—who do not understand the feelings of little folks not only, but do not seem to understand anything very clearly; who do not seem to live in the same world, who are constantly forcing upon the young ones standards and notions which

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs. E. F. Verdery to the author.

they cannot understand, which they instinctively reject. They live in a world of delightful imagination; they pursue persons and objects that never existed; they make an Argosy laden with gold out of a floating butterfly,—and these stupid Olympians try to translate these things into uninteresting facts.”<sup>1</sup>

In Sunday school, the boy Tommy learned the shorter catechism—a hard struggle, for he committed to memory with difficulty.<sup>2</sup> He widened his acquaintance with the Bible, which was to remain, all his life, his daily companion and guide.

There were other subtle and intangible but pervasive implications in the very atmosphere of the Church—especially the Presbyterian Church. These were chosen people, foreordained and predestined. They were the precious of the earth: what they believed was true: it was the way of salvation. How easily such ideas filter into and through the sensitive mind of a boy! Within this charmed circle there was another quality of eminence, and that was the leadership of the Church—the minister at the head of everything, and below him the elders. It was not an aristocracy: it was a leadership. It was not a command of men’s souls—like that exercised by Roman Catholicism—it was a domination, by sheer reason, of their minds. What a thing of distinction it was, then, to stand above such a group and set forth the truth of the Word of God. How it must have impressed the mind of the intense little boy in the fourth pew! A little boy who knew from his earliest years the fame of his own ministerial ancestors—who was himself expected to carry down the great tradition.

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<sup>1</sup>Address delivered before the Fortieth Annual Convention of the Pennsylvania State Sabbath School Association at Pittsburgh, October 13, 1904. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 474.

<sup>2</sup>One of his teachers was Mrs. Stovall, an aunt of Pleasant Stovall.

No one can understand Woodrow Wilson without knowing his deep religious foundations.

#### IV. THE CIVIL WAR

During the most impressionable years of the boy's life, his people, his own town, his family itself, were passing through that ordeal of fire and misery which was the Civil War. He was a few months beyond eight years old when Lee surrendered; he was fourteen when the family left Augusta. For the next three years, until he went off at seventeen, to college, he was living in Columbia, South Carolina, where the effects of the war had been even more terrible and the suffering and hatred bitterer. More than twelve years of his life, therefore, were spent among the convulsions of a society immediately at war or in the exhaustion that followed upon defeat. They were years crowded with mighty events—the greatest war the nation had ever known: greater than any the world had seen since the time of Napoleon or was to see again until 1914, when the child of Augusta had become President at Washington.

It is always difficult to decide how deep a mark such events, such an atmosphere, leave upon the spirit of a child. How far does he become the object he looks upon? How far does the object become part of him "for the day, or a certain part of the day, or for many years, or for stretching cycles of years?" He was a shy, thoughtful, imaginative boy, dwelling much in his own dreams. While he lived in a peculiarly sheltered home, he must have been conscious daily of the strain and passion and suffering that grew as the war deepened, for he had the visible evidences of them constantly before his eyes. They provided that unconscious early conditioning of childhood upon which modern psychology lays so much stress. He himself once said that "a boy never gets over his boyhood,

and never can change those subtle influences which have become a part of him, that were bred in him when he was a child."

In the youth of every high-tempered, sensitive, poetic nature, there is the struggle between the deep inner life with its love of quiet things, and thought and visions, and the compulsions of a rough and unreasonable outer world. In the boy Tommy's life this was emphasized on the one hand by the unusual intensity of his nature—intensity from beginning to end was the mark of his personality—and by the extreme wildness, ugliness, hatred, suffering, of the outer world that immediately surrounded, pressed upon, dominated all his early life. It was a world at war, disordered, lawless, leaderless: a world so torn with evil passions that there was no place where a man might think his thoughts in quietude, might create beautiful things, might live in comeliness and courtesy. It was a world that cried out to be put to rights with no one to put it to rights. Must one stop thinking and creating to restore order that he might have space and peace to think again? To the end of his life, Woodrow Wilson was to know this struggle, was to be goaded by such questioning.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Augusta became one of the principal centres of Confederate industrial activity. The United States arsenal, already an institution of the town, was seized by Southern forces, and ammunition was produced in large quantities for the Confederate army. Other factories sprang up, and in the wild exuberance of enlistment, two thousand men went as soldiers out of a population of fewer than ten thousand white people.

The boy was probably too young in the early part of the war to have been much impressed by anything save the atmosphere of stress and disturbance, with occasional



vivid pictures, as we know, of marching soldiers, or of his father anxiously going and coming as a chaplain in the Confederate army, or of his mother constantly fearful for the safety of her husband, her brothers, her friends, and, later in the war, worried over the shortness of food. A time came when it was impossible to obtain commodities like salt, when a cake of soap cost twenty-five dollars in Confederate money, when the Wilson household was eking out its larder with soup made of cow peas from the fields, the delicious taste of which the boy Tommy never forgot.

He must also have seen and wondered at the transformation of his father's great church across the street into a hospital where hundreds of wounded soldiers lay suffering and dying. He must have seen the very churchyard changed into a prison camp with men in ragged blue uniforms under guard. He must have been present upon that solemn Sunday—one may hear about it yet in Augusta—when Dr. Wilson announced to his congregation that a great battle was impending, that the Southern army was desperately in need of ammunition, and that he would therefore dismiss the congregation at once, with a benediction, that they might repair, men, women, and children, to the ammunition factories to help with the cartridge rolling. It had come to such a pass that the war had obliterated even the Presbyterian Sabbath!

Did the boy share in the excitement and terror of the news that Sherman's army was cutting its way with sword and fire through the heart of the South: that its outposts might any time be seen in the streets of Augusta? How did the frantic effort of a discouraged people to save what little was left of their possessions impress the child? Did he see the huge piles of baled cotton rising in the broad main street of the town, carried there from sheds and



warehouses so that when Sherman came he could destroy their wealth perchance without setting their homes aflame? Did he share in the relief when Sherman passed by without entering the town?

We know that he and all his family watched in dumb forbearance the captured President of the Confederate States, Jefferson Davis, passing through the streets, guarded by Federal soldiers; and we know that, still later, on a great, if sad, day when peace had come, he was of the eager crowd that welcomed General Robert E. Lee on his visit to Augusta. He was there, a little boy, to see the greatest hero of the Confederacy, who was to remain one of his permanent heroes: a man who merited the title "noble," a higher and finer title than "great." He said long afterward in an address at the University of North Carolina that he had "the delightful memory of standing, when a lad, for a moment by General Lee's side and looking up into his face. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The boy must have sympathized deeply, also, with his father's view of the war. Dr. Wilson, while born in the North, had become a Southern sympathizer—but he was never as violent a partisan as many men of the older Southern tradition. Some of his own brothers were in the Union army, two of them generals. On the slavery question he never took a strong stand. It was the right of secession that appealed to the stout independence of his Scotch-Irish heart; and his own warm friendships, his loyalty to his people, did the rest. When the break in the Presbyterian Church took place after the memorable and heated debates at the Philadelphia Assembly in 1861, Dr. Wilson sided wholly with the Southern cause: and the first Southern Assembly was held in his church at Augusta: it was here that the Southern Presbyterian Church was

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<sup>1</sup>On the hundredth anniversary of Lee's birth, January 19, 1909. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. II, pp. 68-69.

organized, a schism which continues to this day. Dr. Wilson himself became Permanent Clerk, a position which he held for thirty-seven years.<sup>1</sup>

During all the troubled years of the war and afterward, the boy Tommy saw his father carrying forward the work of his church with unremitting energy. At its lowest ebb, when the people of Augusta were themselves feeling the pinch of hunger, one may find a record in the minutes of the church of a collection taken for maintaining missions in China. That was the sort of people they were.

Another problem concerned Dr. Wilson deeply, and must also have impressed the mind of the boy. Coloured people swarmed on every side. The Negro question was at the heart of the war itself. We find Dr. Wilson establishing a Sunday school for Negroes on November 17, 1860; a Sunday school that was maintained all through the war and afterward. We find many Negro members of his church; there are some even to-day.

One can see all of these things passing before the boy's eyes, entering into the soul of him, as he walked those quiet, shady old streets, attended the school on the river bank, listened to the reading, day by day, of the greatest books in the world, attended the church and heard the great rolling voice of his father reading the Psalms or the Book of Job or the Gospel of St. John. "How Firm a Foundation." He saw wounded and suffering soldiers, and prisoners of war, and Negroes intoxicated with a freedom that they themselves had not earned, and the excesses of carpet-bag governors who knew neither the law nor the people. "Subtle influences which became a part of him, that were bred in him when he was a child." They furnished the background for not a few of his writings; they corrected and verified the book in which he deals especially with this period, *Division and Reunion*—one of

<sup>1</sup>He was also at one time Moderator of the Assembly.

the first books to take a dispassionate view of the Civil War.

The boy Tommy began early to be different, an exception. He had not the usual schooling, the usual home life, the usual carefree boyhood, the usual physical robustness. He was never schooled in the habits of the crowd. There exists a fond American presumption that a great man must as a boy somehow have been common and crude. We somehow consider his democracy proved if we can be shown that there was nothing whatever remarkable or exceptional about our hero, that after having the usual boyish experiences, he became celebrated by a kind of easy magic—just as any man of us could do if only he had the trick of it.

"We desire," said the educator, Woodrow Wilson, long afterward, "not to be supposed to be unlike other persons; we would prefer to abjure our individuality. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Boy or man, Woodrow Wilson never abjured his individuality. He began early to think his own thoughts, cherish his own visions, go his own way. The world was utterly chaotic, incomprehensible; he must struggle to his own conclusions regarding it. Many an ambitious Southern youth, brought up, like Tommy Wilson, in the atmosphere of war and reconstruction, found it easy and natural to react with the crowd; to play the politics of the time by "waving the bloody shirt"; or by keeping alive the hatreds of the war, or by stimulating rather than allaying race animosities.

We know how deeply Woodrow Wilson loved the South—his letters and his addresses are full of expressions of his loyalty. "The only place in the country, the only place in the world," he once said, "where nothing has to be explained to me is the South."

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<sup>1</sup>Address before the Pennsylvania State Sabbath School Association at Pittsburgh, October 13, 1904. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 475.

We know also how painfully he thought about the problems of the Civil War, the history of the causes that led up to it, the larger results of the defeat of the South and of the excesses of the years of reconstruction which followed it—yet one may search through his addresses, his books, even his private letters, and never find a single word of hatred or of bitterness. He speaks of the war, indeed, as “a dark chapter of history,” for he knew well what it meant in the lives of human beings, but his position is that of the thoughtful man who is “neither justifying nor condemning, but only comprehending.”<sup>1</sup>

Many of the causes which combined to make Tommy Wilson different also operated to make him thoughtful; to give him the scholar's or philosopher's steady point of view. He had his father always at his side, a cultivated man with a broad outlook, a religious man setting forth principles that lay deep beneath the surface conflicts, sectional feeling, race antagonisms, however bitter, that crashed around them. What was the Church for, and what religion, if not for law, order, forbearance, steadiness, the long look ahead? “Eternal things!”

It is said that what a boy is at fourteen, that he remains. Tommy Wilson was fourteen when the Wilson family left Augusta for Columbia where Dr. Wilson had been called to higher service as a professor in the Columbia Theological Seminary.

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<sup>1</sup>“The Reconstruction of the Southern States,” article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, January, 1901. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 391.



# CHAPTER III

## ADOLESCENCE

1870-1874

That is a shallow view of life which makes youth no essential part of it. . . .

*Baccalaureate Address, Princeton University,  
June 12, 1904.*

Surely a man has come to himself only when he has found the best that is in him, and has satisfied his heart with the highest achievement he is fit for. . . .

Christianity gave us, in the fullness of time, the perfect image of right living, the secret of social and of individual well-being; for the two are not separable, and the man who receives and verifies that secret in his own living has discovered not only the best and only way to serve the world, but also the one happy way to satisfy himself. Then, indeed, has he come to himself.

*When a Man Comes to Himself.*

### I. SOUTH CAROLINA

WHILE Woodrow Wilson's character and career, his distinctive qualities and his limitations, can be explained in large measure by his heredity and his early environment, there is danger in the case of Wilson as in that of Lincoln, because the elements of heredity and environment are both so exceptional, of over-simplification. That was the Scot in him. That was County Down. That was his early environment. That was the training of his father. It is easy and comforting to fall back upon such too-facile explanations. But he had something, a spark, a spirit, an eager essence, that no blood relative inherited, no one of his environment developed. From the first we have the record in letters and reminiscences of a youth who made a singularly vivid impression of indi-



viduality upon people, who was "different," "distinctive." Later writers, failing to unlock the mystery with the familiar pass-keys to American leadership, use such expressions as "baffling," "complex," "prophetic." Like Lincoln, he seemed always to belong in his environment but not to be of it. As he himself once said in an essay upon one of his heroes:

"There are born now and again . . . men of so intense and individual a cast that . . . they command their own development."

It is a phenomenon familiar enough in the lives of men destined to occupy a great place in the world. They begin early to "command their own development." But why do they begin? What spirit is it that gives them a prophetic instinct for preparation, a passion for growth?

We have a glimpse of Wilson, at sixteen, sitting at his desk under a portrait of Gladstone, busily teaching himself shorthand. When his little cousin asks whose portrait it is, the boy looks up and responds:

"That is Gladstone, the greatest statesman that ever lived. I intend to be a statesman, too."<sup>1</sup>

Wilson's boyhood, the passive, unconsciously impressionable years, ended with the Augusta period. "Dear quiet sleepy Augusta!" In the latter part of the year 1870, when Tommy was fourteen years old, the family moved to Columbia, South Carolina, and here the youth spent the next three years, among the most important of his whole life. It was the period of his spiritual awakening: of dreams that became visions, of hopes that became purposes.

The removal of the Wilson family to Columbia was something of a triumphant procession. It represented a notable promotion for the brilliant Doctor, for only men who had made distinguished reputations in the ministry

<sup>1</sup>Mrs. Jessie Bones Brower to the author.

for learning, for leadership, for oratory, were chosen by the Presbytery as professors in the theological seminaries. They were to be lights and guides for the rising generation of preachers.

To an impressionable and thoughtful boy of fourteen, the change from Augusta to Columbia was significant in many ways. The actual physical surroundings could not have failed to make a powerful impression upon him. While he had indeed known something of the aftermath of war at Augusta, it was as nothing compared with Columbia sitting in the ashes of her desolation. Sherman's army had left little but smoking ruins. All the principal part of the city, except the Capitol and a few of the churches, was destroyed. Five years had indeed passed, and the wounds were closing, but the scars remained. Worse even than this evidence of the physical brutality of war was the utter demoralization of social and political institutions. City and state, even the university, were in the control of the so-called "carpet-bag government," a travesty upon free government from which decent men turned with loathing.

The Wilson family with its two older girls and two boys—the younger son Joseph was then about three years old—went to live in the Bryce house, nearly opposite the theological seminary, Pickens and Blanding streets. It was near the home of the Reverend Dr. George Howe, also one of the notable figures in the theological seminary, whose son was afterward to marry Anne Wilson. Soon after his arrival, on February 2, 1871, according to the church records, a further distinction was to come to Dr. Wilson. He was appointed to supply the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church at \$1,500 a year, a position which he continued to hold until September 28, 1873. With his income from the theological seminary and his income from the Columbia pastorate, while neither was large, he was thus

in comfortable circumstances compared with most of the population. About this time, also, Mrs. Wilson fell heir to a considerable sum of money from her brother, William, who was a bachelor and who had remained in the North and become prosperous. We find the Wilsons, therefore, buying a plot of land on Hampton Street, at the corner of Henderson,<sup>1</sup> a block or so distant from the seminary, where they built what was then one of the finest houses in the town. It still stands, large, square, comfortable in its roomy yard, with great magnolia trees shading it from the heat of summer. Mrs. Wilson made the plans herself and largely supervised the building. Here the Wilsons went to live in 1872.

In those days education, like everything else in Columbia, was at a low ebb. The best of two or three struggling private schools was kept by Charles H. Barnwell, the sessions being held in a barnlike structure in the rear of the schoolmaster's house, directly across the street from the Wilson home. Here Tommy was to continue his education. Barnwell had studied in the University of Virginia and the University of South Carolina, and had been left poverty-stricken by the war. He had sometimes as many as fifty boys in his school whom he taught at the rate of seven or eight dollars a month, giving them Latin, Greek, and other subjects, and doing practically all the teaching himself. His son, William Barnwell,<sup>2</sup> was one of the pupils, though somewhat younger than Woodrow Wilson. He remembers Tommy as "extremely dignified" but not a brilliant student. "He was not like the other boys. He had a queer way of going off by himself." Yet Mr. Barnwell says he was somehow popular. He had a way of being helpful to the younger students. Barnwell himself remembers being helped by Tommy over a dif-

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<sup>1</sup>Now owned by J. M. Van Meter.

<sup>2</sup>Now President of the National State Bank of Columbia.

ficult lesson. Here in this "select school for boys" young Wilson continued for two or three years.

But it was never the school that educated Woodrow Wilson; never the college or the university. He followed the courses; he passed; but his real education came from the "command of his own development." No boy or youth, no man, could toil more passionately than he in conquering what really interested him. It was so even at this time when Scott's novels and Cooper's romances were so much a part of his life. Like many imaginative boys he had a period when he seems to have lived in a world of dreams of which he himself wove the webs. He became deeply interested in stories of the sea and sea life—pirates, secret islands, treasure. This led him along to narratives of discovery and of naval wars. With many boys the interest would have stopped at the momentary satisfaction of the vicarious spirit of adventure. Not so young Tommy. Though he had never been within scores of miles of the sea, had never seen a body of water larger than the Savannah River, he began to study ships and navigation. He made elaborate and accurate drawings of every type of ocean-going craft. Presently, he became the Admiral of a navy of his own creation and began to write daily reports as such to the Navy Department of the United States Government.

The youth lived months in the characters of his invention and wrote of them with a verisimilitude of detail and a knowledge of ships and sea life, every sail and spar, that was amazing. The interest continued for several years. When the family moved to Wilmington in 1874—he was then nearly eighteen—and he got his first sight of the sea, his old passion revived. He "spent much of his time poking around the vessels there," and at one time fell into the hold of one of them and was badly injured.<sup>1</sup> He wanted

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Mrs. Jessie Bones Brower to the author.



to go to sea—wanted it for a time, one report says, to the point of running away from home—but was dissuaded by the appeals of his mother.

It was not only a world of dreams the boy lived in: it was also a world of men—the most extraordinary group of men, in some ways, that any boy could have had around him. They had no riches, no noted place, no fame in any popular sense, yet they were great men: men of power, scholarship, devotion. The Columbia Theological Seminary itself, with which his father was connected, while it had a great tradition, had known distinguished spiritual leaders, was as poor as poverty in this world's goods. Its chapel was a reconstructed stable; its income as restricted as that of the people, who had just emerged from a disastrous war. Yet it had power, distinction, devotion. From his earliest memories, the boy Wilson was thus impressed by the distinction of intellectual and moral, as compared with political, military, or business achievement. What mattered were the "things of the mind." His first and greatest guide, of course, was his father, but there were other noble exemplars upon every hand. The boy was often in the home of his uncle, James Woodrow, who had a fine collection of scientific specimens collected in various parts of the world, and was familiar with the best thought of his time, ready to take up the cudgels with any comer for Darwin's new explanation of the physical universe. There was his beautiful, white-bearded old Scotch grandfather, a scholar of quite a different sort. He came to visit in the Wilson home; and the boy saw him often—a ripe, rosy-cheeked old gentleman sitting with his Hebrew Bible open on his knees, whispering the words as he read. Or sometimes it was his Greek Testament. Often he had his toddy on the table beside him, and he loved to smoke as he studied. "Every man," he said, "should begin to smoke at fifty-six." The boy also heard



him singing old Scottish songs in a high treble voice. "Twickenham Ferry" was one of them, which Woodrow Wilson himself afterward liked to sing. He was a thorough-going scholar and a devoted man, though sometimes stern with any boy who could not easily begin with the answer to the question, "What is the chief end of man?" and continue to the close of that catechism which was called the "shorter" and which raised terrifying reflections concerning any catechism that might conceivably be longer.

There were other great and able men the boy must either have seen every day or have heard about familiarly—men engaged in studying the Gospel, expounding it, carrying it to foreign lands. Palmer, Leland, Adger, the memory of the famous John Leighton Wilson, one of the greatest missionaries ever sent out from America—these were high men, cultivated, disciplined, devoted to noble purposes outside of their own lives. The spirit in which they lived and worked was well expressed by Dr. George Howe, one of the nearest neighbours and friends of the Wilsons. He was a native of Massachusetts, educated at Middlebury College and Andover, and although he had flattering offers to leave the struggling seminary at Columbia—then in distress of war—he wrote a letter which is now printed in capital letters in the history of the institution:

"When I accepted the professorship which I hold it was with the hope that I might be the means of building up the wastes, and extending the borders of our Southern Zion. . . . It is necessary, whatever the fate of our beloved country, that this seminary should live. If I leave it at the present juncture, its continuance is exceedingly doubtful. If I remain, though the field of my effort must be small, and I must live in obscurity, we may yet transmit to the men of this next generation an institution which will bless them and the world."

"Bear in mind," continues the historian, commenting upon this letter, "that this was a man of Northern birth and rearing who was willing to sacrifice most flattering prospects of worldly advancement, to move in a small sphere and lead a life of obscurity for the sake of a young and struggling institution, rather than endanger its perpetuity."

Such were the men who made up the world of the boy. He knew practically no others. Few young Americans could have imitated Marcus Aurelius more nearly in the catalogue of those to whom he was indebted for his education; few could say more truly:

"To the gods I am indebted for having good grandfathers, good parents, a good sister, good teachers, good associates, good kinsmen and friends, nearly everything good."

Not only was the quality of the men remarkable, but it was a group singularly set in upon itself, dependent upon itself for the true satisfactions of life. All about were confusion, disorganization, poverty, sorrow; what refuge was there but a return to the consideration of "eternal principles," the "serene life of the spirit"? From this secure vantage point they could look out upon the torn world of the post-bellum South and discuss the problems that confronted them all in the light of great principles—problems of the Constitution of the United States, problems of the rights of the Federal government compared with those of the States, problems of what to do with the immense population of coloured people just emancipated from slavery, bitter problems of immediate political corruption, to say nothing of the problems faced by a prostrate community trying desperately to get a living. Political problems were, next to religion, always uppermost with these men; and economic questions, in the modern sense, practically non-existent.

"They were the kind of men," said one of the students of that time who knew them well, "who delighted in historical parallels, who compared the problems of the South with those of Greece and Rome, and when the question of what was to become of the country came up, as it often did, they drew liberally upon their knowledge of the times of Cromwell, and of the French Revolution."

Consider what effect all this ferment of thought and discussion must have had upon the mind of a thoughtful, sensitive, eager boy of fifteen or sixteen. Here were the bitter realities of life glaringly displayed before his eyes; here were its great ideals, religious and moral, resounding daily in his ears. Here was the stern religion of his race demanding devotion, renunciation, separateness; and here the world to be changed, educated, organized. Like all earnest, passionate, thoughtful men, Woodrow Wilson was plagued and harried throughout his life by the contrast between the truth as he saw it, the ideal, and the things that existed in the world about him. How to reconcile the spiritual with the material, the ideal with the real! All vigorous thought concerns itself primarily with this paradox, seeking harmony, struggling for a way of life that cannot be utterly destroyed by the surrounding chaos. No soul not so harried can ever be great.

So we find him attending his father's lectures to the much older students at the theological seminary. It was not only to listen to what his father said, but to be near him, and to hear his fine rolling voice and the beautiful words he used.

"My father occasionally paused in his speech, sometimes at the height of it, seeking exactly the right word to express the idea he aimed to convey," Wilson once told a friend. "Sometimes I would try swiftly, in my own mind, to supply it; but rarely found the inevitable word, as he did."



STABLE IN WHICH THOMAS WOODROW WILSON ATTENDED RELIGIOUS SERVICES, COLUMBIA, S. C.,  
ON THE GROUNDS OF THE COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY





The boy was entrusted with the key to the library of the seminary where he could creep away into an alcove and read by himself.

Sooner or later such a youth, brought up in such a family and in such an atmosphere, must make up his mind regarding the purpose of life, the "chief end of man"; in short, he must come to a religious reckoning. A religious experience, in the belief of everyone around him, was as necessary a part of the life of man as his daily food. There had to be at some point a decision one way or another—downward or upward. It was not only implicit in all the teaching he heard: it was an actual experience in the lives of those around him. Many of the family letters give evidence of the intense religious spirit of these people and the supreme importance they placed upon "being right with God." One such letter, written by Woodrow Wilson's Aunt Marion<sup>1</sup> to her brother Thomas, will illuminate the family spirit. The "Joseph" and "Jeanie" referred to are Woodrow Wilson's father and mother. "James" is Dr. James Woodrow and "William" is William Woodrow, a bachelor brother who died a few years later.

Augusta.

Friday Night. Feb. 24th 1860.

MY DEAREST THOMAS.

This evening your letter, dated last Monday, was received by Joseph; and I cannot go to bed to-night without writing a few lines to you. Oh, my darling Brother! never did any letter give me one tenth part of the joy that this one of yours has done. To think of your being a Christian is almost too much happiness to be at once taken in. But I cannot write as I feel—my heart is *filled* with thankfulness—and the only relief is in prayer.

You will feel as grateful as we do to know that *James* was with us when your letter came. The letter came in *four days*—

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs. James W. Bones.

*was* it not a *kind* providence? Oh it makes us all *so* happy! I am *afraid* to write all I feel.

With what delight I look forward to my return home—Oh! what a guide you will be to me—how happy we will be!—I hope and *pray* that dearest William may soon—yes even *now* follow in your steps. How earnestly and *hopefully* will we all pray for him and our prayers will *surely* be answered.

Joseph will write to you on Sabbath, he says. He has his sermon to write half of to-morrow. Jeanie will write as soon as she can, and James when he gets home, on Monday. He left at midnight, to-night, to go on to Madison, to preach on Sabbath. He says he can preach better after your dear letter, with its precious news.

May our dear Saviour be ever present with you, dearest Thomas. I cannot tell you how much I love you—and my dear William—

Your affectionate Sister  
MARION.<sup>1</sup>

Years later, Woodrow Wilson spoke of the power of such an environment in influencing the religious development of youth:

“We must realize that the first and most intimate and most important organization for the indoctrinating of the next generation is the home, is the family. . . . You must include the fathers, and get your grip upon the home organization in such wise that the children will have the atmospheric pressure of Christianity the week through.”<sup>2</sup>

It happened in the winter of 1872–1873, when he was sixteen, that Tommy Wilson became a great friend of a young man named Brooke, who had come to Columbia to study for the ministry. Brooke was some years older than Tommy and had only a poor preparation, but he was on fire with zeal. He held religious meetings in his room,

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<sup>1</sup>Letter loaned by Mrs. Harriet Woodrow Welles.

<sup>2</sup>Address delivered before the Pennsylvania State Sabbath School Association at Pittsburgh, October 13, 1904. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 480–481.

which the boy Tommy soon began to attend. Other students joined in and presently the meetings grew so large that they moved to the chapel of the seminary, a little one-story brick stable which looks to-day very much as it must have looked then. Pictures of the leaders of the Church hung upon its walls, and a low rostrum faced the crude wooden benches. Here the meetings continued for some time. Years later, when Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, came again to Columbia, he paused in the doorway of the chapel:

"I feel," he said, "as though I ought to take off my shoes. This is holy ground." He also said of it, "I have never heard greater speaking in my life than I have heard from that rostrum."

The records of the First Presbyterian Church contain the information that "Thomas W. Wilson applied for membership" in the church, July 5, 1873. It is a remarkable thing that, in chronicling new memberships, the record, over a long period of years, contains no enlargement upon the bare statement of the fact in any case except that of young Wilson and his friends. Here the minutes speak of "three young men out of the Sunday school and well known to us all"—Thomas W. Wilson being one of them. "After a free confession," continues the record, "during which they severally exhibited evidences of a work of grace begun in their hearts, [they] were unanimously admitted to the membership of this church."<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that Woodrow Wilson regarded this "religious turning" as one of the important crises in his life. It was no mere emotional outburst: it was an intellectual conviction. And what he accepted at that time—both spirit and doctrine—continued with him to the end of his life. He read his Bible daily—he wore out two or three

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<sup>1</sup>He remained a member until January 1, 1875, when the record shows a letter of dismission to the First Presbyterian Church of Wilmington, North Carolina.

Bibles in the reading of them—he prayed daily upon his knees, he said grace before every meal.

“I do not see,” he once wrote, “how any one can sustain himself in any enterprise in life without prayer. It is the only spring at which he can renew his spirit and purify his motive. God is the source of strength to every man and only by prayer can he keep himself close to the Father of his spirit.”

His career can in no wise be understood without a clear knowledge of these profound religious convictions. There they rested always, immovable, certain, like rocks in a weary land. Religion was never incidental with him; it was central. He never doubted. He told a friend, in his later years, that “so far as religion is concerned, argument is adjourned.”<sup>1</sup> His beliefs were old beliefs, tested by generations of intellectual gladiators, lived ardently by earnest men. He was ever in the line of the great Protestant English-American tradition. He believed that existence “without quick religious life [was] a furnace without fire,—a pursuit without goal,—a measurement without standard.”<sup>2</sup>

Such being the case, it becomes important to know exactly what were the essentials of the faith to which the youth gave his allegiance there in Columbia in the spring of 1873.

We have the essential elements of it set forth in Woodrow Wilson’s own words. He is speaking of what he calls the “‘Magna Charta’ of the human soul”—the Bible:

“It reveals every man to himself as a distinct moral agent, responsible not to men, not even to those men whom he has put over him in authority, but responsible through his own conscience to his Lord and Maker. Whenever a man sees this vision he stands up a free man, what-

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<sup>1</sup>To Dr. Cary T. Grayson.

<sup>2</sup>Notes for an address at the University of Virginia, October 19, 1905.



ever may be the government under which he lives, if he sees beyond the circumstances of his own life.”<sup>1</sup>

Having thus reached the conviction that man is “not the creature of the drawing room or the stock exchange, but a lonely, awful soul confronted by the Source of all souls,” he knows his own future calling, understands the “object of the struggle.” He knows that, if he serves God, nothing else really matters.

But this was not all. It was never more than a step with the Scot from his religion to his attitude toward his environment, especially political. This followed naturally, because the state with its laws had power to influence his worship of God. Dr. Stalker says of John Knox:

“Only less important to his native land than his religious views were the Scottish Reformer’s political opinions. To himself, in all probability, the two appeared to be one; and, ever since, in the Scottish mind the waters of religious and political conviction have been in close proximity, with a constant tendency to mingle.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus their own inner convictions became more important to this tough breed than any prince, nobility, or, indeed, any government. More important than their friends! They began to get the democratic idea that government was for them, rather than they for government.

There was a further corollary of these yeasty ideas. If each human soul was so important in the sight of God, and it was so necessary that each should know “the Word,” and not take his beliefs upon the authority of a priest, then he must be educated. Therefore, the Scots of the Reformation and their successors set the school-house close to the church.

To the Scotch Presbyterian, then, religion, the service

<sup>1</sup>Address at the Tercentenary celebration of the translation of the Bible into the English language, Denver, Colorado, May 7, 1911. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. II, p. 292.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. James Stalker, *Life of John Knox*, p. 177.



of God, was the supreme interest, but there must be a government that would permit or at least not interfere with that service, and there must be education that the individual might know the will of God.

Here we have clearly the three interests which most concerned Woodrow Wilson throughout his life: religion, politics, education.

There are other important corollaries springing from the vital doctrines he accepted. If the individual man is supremely important, if he is a predestined and fore-ordained agent in the hands of the Almighty, he has nothing to fear from kings, governments, even the hand of fate. He has nothing to fear but God. He is immortal until his work is done. He feels himself in a crisis, as Wilson did, "guided by an intelligent power outside himself."<sup>1</sup> Given even a few men, let alone a whole race, imbued with such a faith, and there is no end to their achievements.

Still another attitude of mind springs naturally from the Presbyterian doctrine. Men who are lost in sin and saved by the grace of God cannot but think with awe of the difference between themselves and the rest of the world. Divine discrimination has lifted them into a place of prominence. They are full, at the best, of what may be called humble superiority; at the worst, of fierce prejudices, intolerance, even burning fanaticism.

It would be ridiculous, of course, to assume that Woodrow Wilson was full-panoplied with all these doctrines, or that he necessarily accepted all of them, but it must never be forgotten that this was literally the atmosphere of thought and conviction in which he grew up.

It is significant, in surveying Wilson's entire product, how much of it is devoted to the expression of his religious beliefs. Not only are there set lectures and addresses and constant references in other public papers,

<sup>1</sup>Miss Margaret Wilson to the author.

but he delivered innumerable talks during his long college career, ranging from baccalaureate addresses to informal speeches at chapel and before college religious organizations.

"I have more than once heard men say that they never heard such prayers; they were marked by beauty in language and reality in spirit. He prayed like a man who knew God not only as a fact in history or a doctrine in theology or an ideal in ethics, but as an experience in his own soul."<sup>1</sup>

It was in the early spring of 1873, when he was sixteen years old, that the youthful Wilson thus began, as he himself said, to "command his own development." Years later, the mature Wilson wrote an essay which he called, "When a Man Comes to Himself." He thought of the process as a definite and placeable experience: the step forward from drift and passivity to self-command. It may have been the sublimation of the ingrained Presbyterian doctrine of conversion: it was deep in the mind of the man as a practical process. We have prompt evidence of the change in him in a letter written by Professor James Woodrow to his son, who was about Tommy's age and was then in Germany with his mother.

"I don't know whether you care to hear about any of the boys here; and if I did, I don't know which they are. Tommy Wilson still attends Mr. Barnwell's school, opposite their house, and is said to be studying well. He seems to have improved."

Shortly afterward, we find him hanging up the portrait of Gladstone over his desk!

In the fall of that year, Tommy went away with his friend Brooke to enter Davidson College,<sup>2</sup> with the gen-

<sup>1</sup>The Reverend Dr. John McDowell to the author.

<sup>2</sup>Francis J. Brooke became a Presbyterian minister, and to the end of his life maintained a warm friendship with Woodrow Wilson. The day before the Baltimore convention in 1912, Mr. Wilson, hearing that Brooke's daughter had met a tragic death, dropped everything to send his sympathy.

eral understanding on the part of his family that he was to study for the ministry.

The Columbia years were among the richest of his life. When he thought of his youth, it was always of Columbia rather than of Wilmington or Augusta. "My own very happy boyhood in Columbia."<sup>1</sup> He returned eagerly in later years to visit his friends and relatives. There in the churchyard lie buried his father, his mother, and his much-loved sister Anne. A stone at the edge of the crowded lot bears the inscription:

HERE LIE THE REMAINS OF  
PRES. WILSON'S PARENTS.

Dr. Wilson and his wife, Jessie Woodrow, lie side by side. Woodrow Wilson wrote the inscription for the simple stone that marks his father's grave:

JOSEPH RUGGLES WILSON,  
Son of  
JAMES & ANNE ADAMS WILSON  
Born at Steubenville, Ohio,  
February 28, 1822.  
Died at Princeton, New Jer.  
January 21, 1903.

Pastor, teacher, ecclesiastical leader  
For thirty-four years Stated Clerk  
of the General Assembly of the Pres-  
byterian Church in the United States.

Steadfast, brilliant, devoted, loving  
and beloved. A master of serious  
eloquence, a thinker of singular  
power and penetration, a thoughtful  
student of life and of God's purpose,  
a lover and servant of his fellow men,  
a man of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to David Clymer Ward, December 14, 1914.

## II. DAVIDSON COLLEGE AND WILMINGTON

Davidson College is situated about twenty miles north of Charlotte, North Carolina, in a country of rolling red fields, corn, wheat, sheep, and some cotton. The town consisted in Wilson's time, as it does to-day, of a single straggling street devoted almost entirely to student trade. Those stout old Presbyterians of the middle of the last century liked to get their colleges well out in the country away from temptation.

When Tommy Wilson became a student, the whole country was still suffering from the exhaustion caused by the war. The only railroad serving Davidson, the Atlantic, Tennessee and Ohio, had been destroyed during the war, but the tracks had recently been relaid. The trains were slow and the service poor.

"A jealous conductor shot a man who, riding a mule, was outdistancing his train!"<sup>1</sup>

If the college lacked material advantages, it had a soul of its own. It represented the passion of that early Scotch and Scotch-Irish population for an education. They were not too poverty-stricken even in those days following the war to tax themselves for institutions such as this.

In the fall of 1873, when young Wilson entered, there were one hundred and seven students,<sup>2</sup> and almost all of the activities of the institution were carried on in one huge building with imposing stone pillars in the old Southern style, standing like sentinels in front. It had been erected at the unheard-of cost of \$85,000 and was the feature of the entire countryside. From the cupola, one could see Storm King Mountain, and even, on clear days, the Blue Ridge. Here, on the first floor, in the north wing, Room 13, young T. W. Wilson went to live. His room-

<sup>1</sup>Cornelia Shaw, *History of Davidson College*, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>In 1924, six hundred and forty students.



mate was John William Leckie, who died a few years later. There were two other noteworthy buildings on the campus, those devoted to the debating societies—the Eumenean and the Philanthropic—features which no Southern institution of those days felt that it could be without.

Excellent reasons existed for sending young Wilson to Davidson, besides his friendship for Brooke. His father and his Uncle James Woodrow were both much interested in the school; and Dr. Wilson was soon to be a trustee. It was, moreover, a sound Presbyterian institution, sending many students to the Columbia seminary.

Fellow students of young Wilson describe him as a quiet, superior sort of boy, studious rather than athletic. Dr. Fraser speaks of him as “witty, genial, superior, but languid.” He played centre field in the baseball games and was an average batter, but Robert Glenn, captain of the team, afterward Governor of North Carolina, remarked explosively:

“Tommy Wilson would be a good player if he weren’t so damned lazy!”<sup>1</sup>

But Tommy Wilson was not lazy. He was somewhat delicate in health and his interests were intellectual, not physical. He had been poorly prepared for college, and though the requirements were not severe, he was conditioned in ancient geography and Cicero, and entered his mathematics and Greek classes on probation. He was thus under heavy pressure to make up his work. The end of the year found him near a physical breakdown.

Here at Davidson, as at other institutions which he attended, Wilson made only an average record in his studies—not the worst, but not the best. The original records of Davidson of the term ending December 22, 1873, show that “T. W. Wilson” had the following standings:

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<sup>1</sup>Talks with the Reverend Dr. A. M. Fraser and Victor H. Caldwell, fellow students at Davidson; also letters to the author from the Reverend Dr. Thornton Whaling.



# ADOLESCENCE

75

Logic and Rhetoric . . . . .	95
Greek . . . . .	87
Latin . . . . .	90
Mathematics . . . . .	74
Composition . . . . .	96
Declamation . . . . .	92
Deportment . . . . .	100

For the second term report, on June 25, 1874, his standing was as follows:

English . . . . .	97
Greek . . . . .	88
Latin . . . . .	94
Mathematics . . . . .	88
Composition . . . . .	95
Declamation . . . . .	92
Deportment . . . . .	100

It will be seen that here, as at other times in his college work, he was lowest in mathematics and highest in composition and English.

The life at Davidson, in those years, was decidedly primitive. The boys had to cut their own wood to keep their fireplaces going, and bring their own water. But expenses were low and the number of boys paying their own way was large.

At Davidson, as later at Princeton and the University of Virginia, Wilson's real interest was in the debating societies, and in studying subjects either outside of the curriculum or only remotely connected with it. He was chosen almost immediately as a member of the Eumenean Society. The brick building where the meetings were held still stands, and the dignified old furniture has a kind of sedate magnificence appropriate to the seriousness with which the youths of those days burned offerings on the altar of oratory. It is significant that almost the first thing that the boy Wilson did was to interest himself in the con-

stitution of the society. He was instrumental in providing a new record book and himself copied out with many flourishes the entire constitution—a handwriting not yet settled into the copper plate of later years. The motto of the society was "*Pulchrum est Colere Mentem*" and it is declared that "the object of this Society shall be the acquirement of literary knowledge, the promotion of virtue, and the cultivation of social harmony and friendship." It is significant of the interests which stirred the minds of the boys of that time that such questions as these should have been debated:

"Was the introduction of slavery into the United States beneficial to the human race?"

"Was the death of Lincoln beneficial to the South?"

"Was John Wilkes Booth a patriot?"

The Eumenean Society was always opened with prayer, and it is of record that young Wilson, although a freshman, was early called upon to conduct this religious service.

The discipline was extremely severe, and the president stern in his punishment for minor infractions of order. It is of record that T. Wilson was fined ten cents (it is marked "Pd.") for "sitting on the rostrum."

The books of the society show that the first recorded public appearance of the youth was on December 1, 1873, and the subject which he discussed, taking the negative, was "Resolved, That Republicanism is a better form of government than a limited monarchy." He delivers an "original oration" on January 17th and debates the question of compulsory education—in the affirmative—on February 20th. In May, he is excused from several meetings on account of illness.

Davidson College always had a warm spot in Wilson's heart. His correspondence of later years shows that he never lost an opportunity to express his affection or to

comply with the requests of students or faculty for friendly services. At the Inauguration in 1913, a delegation of eighty students from Davidson College marched with the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, carrying the Davidson banner. On May 20, 1916, President Wilson visited Charlotte to celebrate the Centennial of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. In spite of crowding engagements, he determined to drive over to Davidson in the afternoon with Mrs. Wilson to see the old college.

There is extant a beautiful story to the effect that the visit was an entire surprise—that when he tapped on the door of his old room in Chambers Hall, the student within called out:

“Come in.”

When Mr. Wilson did not answer, he shouted:

“Who’s there?”

Mr. Wilson answered: “This is President Wilson.”

The student instantly replied:

“Come on in—this is Christopher Columbus!”

When the Presidential party actually filed into the room, it is veraciously narrated that the student plunged head first out of the window!

It is unfortunate that the historian has to destroy a tale so perfect. As a matter of fact, President Wilson let it be known that he was coming, but that he wished no demonstration. Professor Lingle went to the point of seeing that the old room in Chambers Hall was in good order against Mr. Wilson’s visit.

When the President went into the Eumenean Building he remarked:

“I once tried to make a speech in this room, but couldn’t.”

The youth returned home in June, 1874. He was not in good health, nor was he well enough prepared to enter Princeton that fall. He therefore remained at home for

the following fifteen months: studious, dreamy months, partly spent at Columbia, mostly at Wilmington, North Carolina, where the Wilson family went to live in the fall of 1874.

Although Dr. Wilson liked Wilmington better than any town he had lived in, and made indeed a notable record as a minister,<sup>1</sup> the son, who was still called "Tommy," seems to have been little impressed by his life there. He was nearly eighteen years old, and his character had become pretty thoroughly set in its main purposes. He was tall, awkward, and shy. "An old young man," the coloured butler of the Wilson family described him.<sup>2</sup> One friend remembers him as "dignified and very courteous." "You should have seen him walking to church in the morning with his mother and the way he handed her into the pew."<sup>3</sup>

The fact is that young Wilson was withdrawn—withdrawn into his own mind. He read much and deeply, and spent his leisure time poking around the docks of Wilmington, which in those days were visited by ships flying every flag in the world. Apparently, he made few friends of his own age—a few excursions and picnics, a few hesitant calls on the "ladies," a brief and stilted correspondence with one of them, and one real friendship, and all the rest of that year of Wilson's life seems to have been spent in more or less solitary reading, thinking, and dreaming. It was the old story of a sensitive youth full of high ambition, keen intellectual interests, placed in an environment which, outside of his own family, seemed wholly to want understanding or sympathy. Possibly, if he had been able to make advances more

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<sup>1</sup>A tablet on the wall of the First Presbyterian Church commemorates Dr. Wilson's pastorate:

November 1, 1874—April 5, 1885  
A Preacher of Righteousness

<sup>2</sup>David Bryant, to the author.

<sup>3</sup>Miss Bellamy to the author.



easily, possibly if he had been more exuberant physically, he would have found other congenial contacts, but he probably felt that even to talk of the subjects which most absorbed him would subject him to sly derision.

The one friend was John D. Bellamy, a little older than young Wilson, one of the few young men in town who had any intellectual interests.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bellamy remembers vividly reading aloud Scott's *The Pirate* with young Wilson. They would walk over to what was called in those days Delgado Mills, which had been a camp for Confederate troops during the war. There were fine trees about, and the young men would lie on the mounds which had formerly covered the ammunition magazines and take turns in reading aloud.

Mr. Bellamy says that Wilson was never content with the mere reading of the story. He wanted to discuss it at great length. He wanted to compare the characters and make up his mind which he liked best. Although Mr. Bellamy has never read *The Pirate* since, he can still remember their discussions of Yellowley, how he rode the Shetland pony and ripped out Latin quotations. Yellowley seemed to impress Wilson as being one of the oddest characters he ever knew. They debated the qualities of the girls, Minna and Brenda, and tried to decide which they liked better.

Bellamy also remembers the eagerness with which young Wilson discussed various famous men. He admired Cromwell and Gladstone, Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee, and questioned why it was that they were great.

Everyone at Wilmington who knew the Wilsons recalls one thing about them: the intense attachment of father and son and the pride of the father when the son began to fulfil his confident predictions.

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<sup>1</sup>Mr. Bellamy, to whom the author is indebted for interesting facts, is one of the leading lawyers of North Carolina, formerly a member of Congress.



"I have just received one of the finest letters I ever had from Tommy. It is a regular love letter."<sup>1</sup>

Years later, the old Doctor remarked, "My boy Woodrow can make as good an after-dinner speech as Chauncey Depew."<sup>2</sup>

And yet, when a friend remarked, "Dr. Wilson, you must be very proud of that son of yours," he responded instantly, "I am very *fond* of him."

By the fall of 1875, when he was nearly nineteen years old, Wilson thought himself well enough prepared to enter Princeton.

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<sup>1</sup>Miss Anna Savage to the author.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PRINCETON STUDENT

1875-1879

. . . any pupil who is contented with what the textbook contains is not educated. He is just like a little bird on a branch with his mouth open waiting to have things put in it. My father, who was addicted to strong terms, once said to me, "The mind is not a prolix gut to be stuffed; it is a digestive organ, it is an assimilating organ, and what it does not assimilate it rejects and gets no profit from." And if you treat the mind, as you do treat the mind of the present young American, as a prolix gut to be stuffed, why, the young American when he gets to be an old American is going to be a useless American, unless in spite of you he learns how to use his mind.

*Address on January 9, 1909.*

It is to get at the spirits of men that the university is created; to my mind it is not to make scholars. No undergraduate can be made a scholar in four years . . . the very best effects of university life are wrought between six and nine o'clock in the evenings, when the professor has gone home, and minds meet minds, and a generating process takes place

*Address before the Twentieth Century Club, Boston, January 3, 1903.*

#### I. WILSON ENTERS PRINCETON

IN SEPTEMBER, 1875, a tall, thin, somewhat angular young Southerner, from North Carolina, walked into Princeton village carrying a ministerial-looking old black bag that had belonged to his father. He was an entire stranger, but he had in his pocket a letter to James McCosh, the president of the college—which he was too shy to present. He wore—probably—the small round hat with the narrow brim which appears in his first class picture, and he had no overcoat, so that, as the term wore

along into the Northern autumn, he often shivered painfully.

He went to live at a boarding house that stood in Nassau Street near the corner of Washington, since removed to make way for college buildings. It was kept by Mrs. Josiah Wright and was listed in *Bric-à-Brac* as the (W)right Bower. There were seventeen roomers in all, mostly freshmen, among them the McCarter brothers and Paul W. Pope. Young Wilson occupied a front room on the second floor.<sup>1</sup> In those days, a young Southerner at a Northern college was likely to feel somewhat self-conscious. Before the war, Princeton had swarmed with Southern students: but the broken South, still bitter with its wounds, was only beginning in 1875 to send its young men northward again. The first student to call upon young Wilson was a junior from Alabama, Frank P. Glass, who took him for his first two weeks to an upper class eating club made up wholly of Southerners.<sup>2</sup> One of his classmates remembers sitting up all night and discussing with Wilson the causes of the Civil War; another tells how, after a similar argument, dealing with the excesses of reconstruction, Wilson's face went white with feeling, and he cried out, "You know nothing whatever about it," and turned and left the company. He was so much a Southerner that he had never even heard "The Star-Spangled Banner."<sup>3</sup> But he was never a "fire-eater" like some of the Southerners who came as students at that time.

It was a great time at Princeton; it was a great time in the development of higher education in the United States. The demoralization of political life which fol-

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs. Titus, a daughter of Mrs. Wright, is still living in Princeton and remembers young Wilson well. To her and to various classmates, the author is indebted for much information concerning these early years.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Glass who became an influential Southern publisher, remained a lifelong friend of Wilson's, and was a devoted supporter in his political campaigns.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, March 25, 1884.

lowed the Civil War—Grant's Administration represented about the lowest ebb of American popular government—seems to have turned men's thoughts toward other activities; on the one hand, vast industrial and pioneering development, and education on the other.

Dr. McCosh had come to Princeton in 1868 and brought with him a new impulse, a new enthusiasm. Eliot became president of Harvard in 1869, Barnard was at Columbia, Woolsey at Yale. Cornell was a new institution, Johns Hopkins was soon to be organized, and Angell to begin the work of bringing the University of Michigan into the forefront of American institutions. Educational problems were in the air; a debate between Dr. McCosh and President Eliot attracted national attention. No thoughtful student with a strong latent interest in education could have found a more stimulating atmosphere than that of Princeton. Wilson seemed always to have had an instinct for the main current, an affinity for that which was most alive.

Dr. McCosh was then at his prime: a leader, a character, a power. Like Wilson's own family, he was Scotch in his origin, equipped with "a rich furniture of fundamental and established principles." He was massive in frame, with a noble head, clear-cut intellectual features, and a magnificent resonant voice.

Both Dr. Wilson and Professor Woodrow were profound admirers of President McCosh. They considered him one of the greatest, if not the greatest, progressive religious leader in the nation. To them he represented the forefront of Presbyterianism. In the Darwinian controversy which was then raging, Dr. McCosh had dared to take a bold position. He was for truth.

"When a scientific theory is brought before us, our first inquiry is not whether it is consistent with religion, but whether it is true. If it is found to be true, on the

principle of the induction of Bacon, it will be found that it is consistent with religion, on the principle of the unity of truth."<sup>1</sup>

When President McCosh made a trip South in 1873, he stopped with Dr. Wilson at Columbia, and the virtues and possibilities of Princeton were powerfully set forth. Tommy was a shy youth of some sixteen years, at home for a vacation from Davidson College, and Dr. McCosh, looking him over with a keenly appraising eye, remarked to Dr. Wilson:

"The boy'll be comin' to Princeton, no doubt."<sup>2</sup>

The remark made a powerful impression upon the youth, as did Dr. McCosh himself. He was the kind of man Wilson admired to the depth of his soul—the scholar, the wit, the leader—and he formed for him a kind of youthful adoration that he never lost. He loved always afterward to talk about Dr. McCosh. He could imitate the Scotch burr of his speech to perfection. Wilson said he was a man "who could be laughed at every day, and never for a moment despised."<sup>3</sup>

He was thinking of Dr. McCosh when he said of Princeton:

"... the best way to image an institution for yourself is to image it in the terms of a particular life which happens to stand in the history of the institution most conspicuous."<sup>4</sup>

It is of some significance, in view of Wilson's own struggle in later years as president of Princeton, that Dr. McCosh's spirited fight to wipe out secret societies which had flourished *sub rosa* was still fresh in men's minds when the youthful Wilson entered as a student. One of the first

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in *The Story of Princeton*, by Edwin M. Norris, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. McAdoo and Mrs. Sayre to the author.

<sup>3</sup>Address at Union College, Schenectady, New York, September 29, 1904.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*



things he was required to do was to sign an agreement not to join a secret society.<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that the youth found his college work, at the beginning, exceedingly difficult. He was asked, in Latin, to read Livy and Horace's Odes; in Greek, Demosthenes and Herodotus, with higher algebra and a stiff course in rhetoric. And he had come poorly prepared. In general reading, in mental acumen and maturity, he was far in advance of the ordinary student; but he was sadly deficient at Greek roots and in mathematics. He could have stood an examination in Lamb's essays, analyzed Webster's oratory, argued the constitutional basis of secession with appropriate historical parallels, proved to his father's satisfaction his belief in justification by faith, and exhibited an astonishing knowledge of English politics, especially the struggles of Gladstone; and he knew shorthand; but these things were of no account to a freshman set face to face with Horace and Herodotus.

## II. HE COMES TO HIMSELF

While the first year at Princeton was a struggle for young Wilson, and his progress was slow, he found there the stimulating intellectual atmosphere and the generous friendships which he needed to bring him out. He began to grow, to take more and more of a hold upon his classmates, and while he was never one of the best students in his classes, "everyone soon began to look upon him as one of the most original and superior men in the college."<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the freshman year, twenty-one members of the class were selected as "Honour Men," but Wilson was not among them. The only thing of importance he seems to have done was to join the famous old Whig Society—a debating club organized by James Madison

<sup>1</sup>A requirement which still exists.

<sup>2</sup>Judge Albert Wylly, a classmate, to the author.

in 1769. "T. Wilson" is reported in the record to have "performed" for the first time on October 29, 1875. His subject was "Rome was not built in a day."

Wilson's second year at college was among the most important of his whole life: a turning-point. An account has already been given of how the youth "came to himself" in respect of religion—in 1873, at Columbia. He was now to come to himself intellectually. These two awakenings, with the powerful emotional awakening which came later, lie at the foundation of his character.

All his life he had been a reader: no casual reader, but one of the eager and passionate kind who is not content until he tears out the very heart of a book. This was true not only of so-called serious books, but of romances and poetry as well. When the boy read Cooper's novels, he wished afterward to act them out; if he read sea stories, he made pictures of the ships described; and he was not content with Scott's romances until he had found someone—his father was his best resource—with whom he could discuss the characters and incidents. Many of the volumes of his reading remained in his library at his death. They are indicative of his passion to know completely and accurately what the author had to say. Here, for example, are such books as *The Federalist*, Greene's *Short History of the English People*—and Macaulay and Bagehot—with the pages underscored and marginally noted to the last degree, and often written synopses appended to the chapters. A classmate, Hiram Woods, recalls finding Wilson, after there had been a discussion of *Macbeth*, poring over an encyclopædia to find out exactly where Birnam Wood was located and what the reference meant. On a vacation which Wilson spent with Hiram Woods's family at Baltimore, a question arose as to the truth of a statement in Macaulay's *History of England*, and Wilson insisted upon running it down in two other English his-

tories. His reading was thus never desultory, and because so thorough, never wide. But what he read he knew.

"The man who reads everything is like the man who eats everything: he can digest nothing; and the penalty for cramming one's mind with other men's thoughts is to have no thoughts of one's own. Only that which enables one to do his own thinking is of real value: which is my explanation of the fact that there are to be found in history so many great thinkers and great leaders who did little reading of books—if you reckon reading by volumes—but much reading of men and of their own times."<sup>1</sup>

Before he entered Princeton he had become interested in English politics. His father took the *Edinburgh Review* and the New York *Nation*. Gladstone had become a hero to him.

". . . I do not know of anyone among modern statesmen whose character is worthier of the study and the imitation of the young men of a free country than is Mr. Gladstone's. His life has been one continuous advance, not towards power only—fools may be powerful; knaves sometimes rule by the knack of their knavery—but towards truth also the while."<sup>2</sup>

One of his satirical classmates—the class historian, Harold Godwin—declares that, on his arrival at college, Tommy Wilson rushed to the library and took out Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. He did rush to the library, but it was to look into the speeches of Burke and John Bright and the essays of Bagehot. These stimulated him enormously and were to exercise a profound influence upon his later life. He also ran across the bound volumes of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1874. He found an article in the April number called "The Orator," which so fired his

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, April 22, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>"Mr. Gladstone: A Character Sketch"—an article published in the *University of Virginia Magazine*, April, 1880. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 66.

imagination that he remembered all his life the exact place at the head of the south stairs in the Chancellor Green Library where he read it. It was brilliantly written, the anonymous author being that Henry W. Lucy, "Toby M. P.," who was afterward to become the bright luminary of *Punch*.

In the article on "The Orator" it is set forth that of the six hundred and fifty-three members of the House of Commons only three can be classified as orators—Mr. Bright, Mr. Gladstone, and, with reservations, Mr. Fawcett. The writer did not place Mr. Disraeli, the Prime Minister, in the class of orators. He called him a successful parliamentary speaker, lacking two important qualities of oratory, "earnestness and simple conviction." He called Mr. Bright, "the orator *par excellence* of the House of Commons," being "precisely the moral and political antithesis of Mr. Disraeli." After emphasizing Bright's firm and constant principles he remarks:

"To an orator this atmosphere of sincerity and honest conviction is a mighty power."

This and succeeding articles, including one (in April, 1875) on "The Democratic Party in the United States," young Wilson consumed with fascinated interest. They gave him for the first time a comprehension of the vast drama of popular government, the heroes who moved upon the stage, the entire process by which the will of the people through powerful leadership was translated into sober law. It was not that these articles in themselves were especially remarkable—they were the precipitate that clarified the mind of the eager youth. They discovered to him the field he loved. They made him suddenly aware of his own powers: he could do these very things himself! He could debate, he could lead! Political arrangement, the method of democratic government, became living things to him.





"THE GANG"

WILSON'S CLOSEST FRIENDS WHILE A STUDENT AT PRINCETON, ALL OF THE CLASS OF '79. TOP: CHARLES W. MITCHELL AND ROBERT R. HENDERSON. CENTRE: W. B. LEE, ROBERT BRIDGES, AND J. EDWIN WEBSTER. BOTTOM: HIRAM WOODS, JR., AND CHARLES A. TALCOTT.





At once he sat down to write to his father at Wilmington, developing with eagerness his new-found enthusiasms. He declared he had found that he had a mind! It was a source of keen disappointment to the family, with its long record in the Presbyterian ministry, that the youth at Princeton seemed to be tending toward another field. All his life long, Dr. Wilson had moments of regret that his brilliant son had not chosen the ministry. Once, after he had listened to the reading of one of Wilson's early essays, the fine old preacher sprang up and kissed his son—they always kissed when they met—and exclaimed, "Oh, my boy, how I wish you had entered the ministry, with all that genius of yours!"

In its essence, Wilson's intellectual awakening was a sudden triumph over the doubt, the want of self-confidence, which had so painfully afflicted him during the year at Wilmington. He knew that it was not the college curriculum that had achieved the miracle; that it had come from within—a discovery which profoundly affected his own later ideas of education.

"The rule for every man is, not to depend on the education which other men prepare for him,—not even to consent to it; but to strive to see things as they are, and to be himself as he is. Defeat lies in self-surrender."<sup>1</sup>

From this moment he "took his education into his own hands." He became known for the confident selection of the work he wanted and the easy indifference to all subjects not directly to his purpose. Such an awakening is not an uncommon phenomenon among youth of vigorous intellect and strong purpose. Wilson himself points out a similar incident in the life of Burke:

"He learned a vast deal, indeed, but he did not learn much of it from his nominal masters at Trinity. Apparently Master Shakleton, at Ballytore, had enabled him

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<sup>1</sup>*Mere Literature*, p. 49.

to find his own mind. His four years at college were years of wide and eager reading, but not years of systematic and disciplinary study. . . . What should arrest our attention is, the law of mind disclosed in the habits of such lads. . . . They long for matter to expand themselves upon; they will climb any dizzy height from which an exciting prospect is promised: it is their joy by some means to see the world of men and affairs."<sup>1</sup>

This was Wilson's own eager and ardent spirit, climbing any dizzy height now that he had found his own mind, in order to see the world of men and affairs. Leadership, political life, the machinery of government—and oratory and literary style as functional methods—became his absorbing interest.

### III. AWAKENING POLITICAL INTEREST

It was not merely from books that stimulation came to the young student. He had before his very eyes one of the great dramas of American political life. In November, 1876—the year he was a sophomore—came the Hayes-Tilden election with its indeterminate result made spectacular by the staging of the struggle in the halls of Congress, and the whole vast dust of discussion of constitutional machinery which arose out of it. We know that the issues were hotly discussed among the students, and that to many an ardent young Democrat the seating of Hayes in preference to Tilden seemed a deliberate flouting of the will of the people. To Wilson, the complications and uncertainties of the American system, the rigidity of our constitutional division of authority, added new fuel to his interest in the older British parliamentary method of responsible leadership. More than one thoughtful student of public affairs in those times, viewing the demoralization of Grant's Administration and the break-

<sup>1</sup>*Mere Literature*, pp. 112-113.

down of our electoral system in the Hayes-Tilden contest that followed so close upon it, wondered, as young Wilson was beginning to wonder, whether the system should not be radically changed. There seemed an appalling decline in American leadership. The giants of other days were gone; it was a time when little men were bickering about great things. During a long walk in the country, he propounded this question to a classmate:

"Have you ever thought of the reason for the decline of American oratory?"<sup>1</sup>

He went on with a kind of passion of interest to inquire why America no longer produced Patrick Henrys, Websters, Clays, Calhouns; whereas England had her Gladstone and Disraeli, and Germany her Bismarck. He then developed the idea which was later to become a keynote of his political writing, that it was due to the deadening mechanism of committee government in Congress. In England, great leadership, great oratory, could survive because issues were fought out on the floor of the Commons, and governments rose or fell by virtue of the force of its leaders as orators and debaters, but in America everything was cut and dried beforehand by decisions formed behind the closed doors of committee rooms. This germinal idea was to develop during the next two years and issue, while he was a senior, in an article of extraordinary maturity and power called "Cabinet Government in the United States." It was published in what was then perhaps the foremost American journal, the *International Review*.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting in this connection that the junior editor of the *International Review*, to whom Wilson submitted his article, was Henry Cabot Lodge. It was to form the basis of his first and most original book, *Congressional Government*; and when he became President

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Hiram Woods to the author.

<sup>2</sup>August, 1879. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 19-42.

of the United States, it was to prompt him to break the tradition of generations and appear in person to deliver his messages to Congress.

The results of Wilson's intellectual awakening were as definite and immediate as in his previous religious awakening. It was not enough to read of orators and oratory, not enough to enjoy the sentimental thrill of other men's triumphs: he must himself become an orator. A classmate discovered him in Potter's Woods near Princeton practising one of Burke's orations, and upon his next visit home he went day after day, during the week, into his father's great empty church at Wilmington and spouted Gladstone, Bright, Patrick Henry, Daniel Webster—and Demos-thenes! It was no mere boyish impulse: he was in deadly earnest. At any cost he would learn to speak. At the close of his sophomore year, we find him writing an article on oratory for the *Princetonian*, of which he had now become an editor. He remarks that he has "been thinking much upon Princeton's oratory," and goes on to develop his ideas:

"We view oratory in an entirely wrong light in Princeton. We are apt to make the same mistake about oratory that so many of us make about other studies. We view oratory as an end, rather than as a means. Let us ask and answer two simple questions, and we will at once be upon surer ground. What is the object of oratory? Its object is persuasion and conviction—the control of other minds by a strange personal influence and power. What are the fields of labour open to us in our future life career as orators? The bar, the pulpit, the stump, the Senate chamber, the lecturer's platform. Keeping any one of these fields of labour in view, we can study intelligently. Even if . . . following a proper method of study and action should exclude us from all College prizes for oratory, we need not be at all discouraged. We wish the training, if we view



our study and practice in the proper light, and the prizes are of secondary importance. . . .

"And now we come to the chief and best means of training the orator—the imitation of classic models. The greatest and truest model for all orators is Demosthenes. One who has not studied deeply and constantly all the great speeches of the great Athenian, is not prepared to speak in public. You may smile at this statement, and say that such opinions are second-hand and out of date. If you think so, you lack, and ever will lack, the true spirit of eloquence. . . . Only as the constant companions of Demosthenes, Cicero, Burke, Fox, Canning, and Webster, can we hope to become orators."<sup>1</sup>

Here spoke the soul of the ardent young student. He was not in college to win prizes—but for self-discipline; to prepare himself for some great purpose: "the bar, the pulpit, the stump, the Senate chamber, the lecturer's platform." It was the power of this purpose which soon began to distinguish him and set him apart, give him "a somewhat detached and superior position."

"We went to college without an objective," remarks a classmate, "but Wilson always had a definite purpose."<sup>2</sup>

#### IV. THE BUDDING DEBATER AND WRITER

Neither must one be content merely to read about debating and writing; one must actually debate and write. We find young Wilson therefore active in the Whig Society—never to win the prizes, but to secure the discipline. March 23, 1877: "T. Wilson spoke on 'The Embodiment of Ideas.'" October 17, 1877: T. Wilson supported the affirmative in a debate on the subject "That a liberal education is to be preferred to an exclusively practical one." The affirmative won. December 6, 1877: "T. W.

<sup>1</sup>The *Princetonian*, June 7, 1877, p. 42, article signed "X."

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Hiram Woods to the author.

Wilson, North Carolina, spoke on 'Bismarck.'"<sup>1</sup> February 1, 1878: "T. W. Wilson was elected Speaker of the Whig Society"—its highest honour. May 24, 1878: Wilson supported the affirmative in a debate, "That a protective tariff is now no longer necessary for the protection of our home industries." The affirmative won. All along he made a strong impression of power upon his fellow students. One of them remembers that "he steadily grew in the estimation of his fellow members until he was recognized as the best debater in the society—always with full and ready knowledge of the question and with unequalled facility in clear expression. He was especially effective in extemporaneous debate."<sup>2</sup>

But even this training was not sufficient. He wanted more debating, and, moreover, since he had become profoundly interested in the British parliamentary system, he wanted to make a laboratory test of it. We find him therefore organizing a Liberal Debating Club among a group of his classmates.<sup>3</sup> The constitution, written out, indeed entirely composed, by young Wilson himself, is still in existence.<sup>4</sup> "This society shall be known as the Liberal Debating Club and shall be founded upon the fundamental principles of *Justice, Morality and Friendship*. . . . The members of this Club shall form a Brotherhood and shall be expected to assist and encourage each other in every possible way." The officers were Charles Talcott<sup>5</sup> of New York, President, and Thomas W. Wilson of North Carolina, Secretary of State. The Secretary of State was Prime

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<sup>1</sup>This oration was published in the *Nassau Literary Magazine*, November, 1877—his first published article. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 1-10.

<sup>2</sup>Frank P. Glass to the author.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Talcott, J. Edwin Webster, Thomas W. Wilson, Hiram Woods, Robert Harris McCarter, Edward W. Sheldon, William Thaddeus Elsing, Harold Godwin, Charles W. Mitchell, M. G. Emery, Jr.

<sup>4</sup>In the possession of Dr. Hiram Woods.

<sup>5</sup>One of Wilson's greatest friends and afterward Congressman from New York.

Minister with far more powers and responsibilities than the President. Bills were to be presented and debated, and the Secretary of State and his "government" could be "sustained" or "turned out" exactly as in the British Parliament.

It was not only as an orator and a debater that he sought to prepare himself: the speaker must also "know the world of men and affairs." We find him, therefore, following ardently the political events in his own country and in Europe. He read persistently the best newspapers and most thoughtful magazines: the New York *Evening Post*, the *Nation*, and the best English journals. His essays of the time often have topical references that show how fresh and clear his knowledge was of "the world of men and affairs."

"The death of Thiers has naturally led us to think," remarks this philosopher of twenty in presenting his paper on Bismarck, "of those whom he has left behind him in the field of European politics."<sup>1</sup>

When he writes later of Gladstone, he refers to his victory over Disraeli in the Midlothian campaign—"the news of whose triumphant issue has just reached us as I write."<sup>2</sup>

His interest is never merely in the news, nor yet in the personalities of the leaders, but in trying to hammer out the meaning of these men and their policies in terms of responsible government. We find this college sophomore forging a definition of the statesman: "men of independent conviction, full of self-trust, and themselves the spirit of their country's institutions."<sup>3</sup> And he defines statesmanship "as being that resolute and vigorous advance towards the realization of high, definite, and consistent aims which issues from the unreserved devotion of a strong intellect

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<sup>1</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup>"Prince Bismarck." *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 6.

to the service of the state and to the solution of all the multiform problems of public policy.”<sup>1</sup> In the essay on Gladstone, a little later, he says:

“Great statesmen seem to direct and rule by a sort of power to put themselves in the place of the nation over whom they are set, and may thus be said to possess the souls of poets at the same time that they display the coarser sense and the more vulgar sagacity of practical men of business.”<sup>2</sup>

He must also know the backgrounds of political life and the origins of political institutions. In his junior year, he discovers Green’s *Short History of the English People*, and devours it with delight. He writes in the *Princetonian* of its “overmastering charm,” and recommends it eagerly to all of his friends. The actual volume he read from, now faded and worn, remains still in his library. It bears his signature and the date, October, 1877, and it is minutely underscored and annotated. What he got out of it was an idea that influenced him powerfully throughout his career, that American history was only a further development of English history—a passing on of the great principles of democratic government. The ardent student expresses it thus in his article in the *Princetonian* for May 2, 1878:

“It is a grateful thought that this History of the English People is a history of the American people as well; it is a high and solemn thought that we, as a lusty branch of a noble race, are by our national history adding lustre or stain to so bright an escutcheon.”

All this added powerfully to his interest in the British system, and in the great tradition of the English race. His Commencement address the following year,<sup>3</sup> indeed, was on the subject, “Our Kinship with England.”

<sup>1</sup>“William Earl Chatham,” prize essay, afterward published in the *Nassau Literary Magazine*, October, 1878. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 68–69.

<sup>3</sup>June 18, 1879.





ALLIGATOR CLUB AT PRINCETON. WOODROW WILSON WITH HAT IN HIS HAND





Another notable result followed upon these studies. He formed the grand idea of writing, sometime, a similar history of the American people—which later he was to realize. He was fired with an intense desire to begin at once, and took long walks about the Princeton countryside, which is unusually rich in historical associations connected with the Revolutionary War campaigns of George Washington. Passages in his *Life of George Washington* and other writings read as though they came fresh minted from personal contact with the very localities.

"We remember the chill, and the ardour, too, of that gray morning when we came upon the startled outposts of the town, the driving sleet beating at our backs; the cries and hurrying of men in the street, the confused muster at our front, the sweeping fire of our guns and the rush of our men, Sullivan coming up by the road from the river. Washington at the north, where the road to Princeton is; the showy Hessian colonel shot from his horse amidst his bewildered men; the surrender; the unceasing storm."<sup>1</sup>

So the young man "took his education into his own hands." As he said of Bismarck, "the singleness of his aim . . . concentrated his powers," and he felt with Pitt "the concentrating power of strong convictions."<sup>2</sup> He went through his courses creditably, he passed, but he sought no honours. A prize, large for those days, was offered for an essay for which he would have had to make a study of certain plays of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. He was strongly urged by his club fellows, confident that he could win it, to enter, but it would have meant a diversion from his own passionate interests, and he would not turn aside.

Yet, in his own field, he won both honours and prizes without seeking them. He was speaker of the Whig Society,

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<sup>1</sup>"The Ideals of America," article published in the *Atlantic Monthly* for December, 1902. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 416-417.

<sup>2</sup>"William Earl Chatham." *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 12.

managing editor of the *Princetonian*; he won one of the sophomore oratorical prizes and the Nassau literary prize for his essay on Pitt; and his senior year, though he was not an athlete, he was chosen president of the baseball association. He was the kind of man who was looked to by his fellows for leadership.

#### V. COLLEGE FRIENDSHIPS

Wilson's high purpose, his devotion to his own absorbing interests, did not cut him off from generous and deep-seated friendships. There was something gay and ardent about him, combined with an underlying earnestness that attracted men to him and held them. He had a kind of charm that to many of his associates was irresistible. He could talk brilliantly, he could sing a song, he could dance a hornpipe, he could tell a story with a delicious command of the Negro or Scotch or Irish dialect. And he was "kind and considerate" or "helpful" to younger or less able students.<sup>1</sup> He was most at home in rather small groups, and preferably with men who had intellectual interests. The friendships made were of the rarest kind, and some of them lasted through storm and stress to the end of his life. Finer relationships between men, more devoted, could scarcely be imagined than those between Wilson and certain of his classmates like Robert Bridges, Charles Talcott, Hiram Woods, and others.

"What people cannot see is the humanness of the man. He was my warm friend for fifty years."<sup>2</sup>

Early in his course, Wilson moved to a room in the newly completed Witherspoon Hall, and a year later went to board with a congenial club of men who called themselves "The Alligators." His room was on the second story at the end of the hall—No. 7. It had a sizable study and a closet

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<sup>1</sup>Judge Albert Wylly and Dr. I. P. Withington to the author.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Bridges to the author.

of a bedroom, and it looked out upon the somewhat distant main street of Princeton village. Young Wilson soon became the central figure in a group known as the "Witherspoon gang." They got together often in the early evening in the room of some one of them and there were grand discussions of every subject under the sun.

After leaving Princeton, he looked back with longing to the old associations, thinking of the "opportunities for *moral* growth and intellectual invigoration such as we used to gain in our intercourse with the dear boys who were accustomed to meet after prayer meeting in No. 9 East Witherspoon."<sup>1</sup>

His own experience of the value of such associations was one of the influences which led him years later to stand so strongly for a reorganization of the university which would encourage and stimulate them.

"We soon found out," writes Robert Bridges, "that he had an eager mind. That is a rare quality among youngsters of eighteen. But there was not a touch of the pedant or dig about him. He was as keen for the life of the college as any one of us; but we soon discovered that what he called 'the play of the mind' was as exhilarating to him as the play of the body to the athlete. He took great pleasure in the writers who used language with precision and with imagination. To him this was not a scholastic pursuit. It was full of the stuff of existence. He would trail a word or a phrase with that eagerness that R. L. S. so exalted. They would pop out in his conversation at the club table as a part of a jest or a noisy dispute. There was a twinkle in his eye, but he knew, and you knew, that he had scored.

"It was as natural for him as an undergraduate to talk about Burke, Brougham or Bagehot, as for the rest of us to allude to Cooper or Mayne Reid. . . .

"This comradeship of his which began on this campus

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Charles Talcott, December 31, 1879.

had a strong hold on him always. It included all kinds of men on the campus and diverse interests. He never lost the joy of it—and I know it often lightened his burdens.”<sup>1</sup>

With some of the friends of that time he carried on an ardent correspondence all his life, letters full of expressions of his affection.

“I believe that I love the fellows of that crowd and value the genuine friendships existing amongst us now more than I ever did before.”<sup>2</sup>

“I often long for a renewal of our old comradeship more than I can tell you. The old love never dies down for a moment, but I can’t keep myself from occasional heart-sickness now and again, because of the dispersion of the old crowd and the necessity which keeps us apart.”<sup>3</sup>

And even during the stress and sorrow of his crowded later years he could write:

“It was a deep distress to me that I could not get over to Charlie Mitchell’s funeral. His death has affected me very deeply. My thought like yours goes back to the old days of our delightful comradeship, and those memories, thank God, are a permanent possession. Death seems to me in such instances a very unreal thing, but it has this terrible aspect of reality, that it does take the dear fellow away from us for the days to come, and I grieve with all my heart.”<sup>4</sup>

“Your affection and confidence mean a vast deal to me.”<sup>5</sup>

“It was a great disappointment not to get over to Cumberland while you were there. . . . I hope you found the boys all well and in good spirits. It seemed strange not

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Bridges, *Woodrow Wilson, A Personal Tribute*.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Robert Bridges, May 21, 1885.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., December 20, 1885.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., January 2, 1918.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., May 24, 1919.



to be part of such a reunion. I shall certainly seek some opportunity to recover the lost ground.

"Please send my love to the gang when you get a chance, and tell them how proud I am to have won their confidence and admiration."<sup>1</sup>

We have one letter from him written to his classmate, J. Edwin Webster, during a summer vacation from college, which is here reproduced entire for the glimpse it gives of the spontaneity of his friendship and his keen interest in the politics of the time:

Columbia, So. Ca. 7/23/78.

DEAR ED., ALIAS DANIEL:

I suppose that my long delay in writing to you has filled you with secret joy because you promised to write to me only on condition of receiving first an epistle from me. But I have not by any means forgotten my promise and I do not intend to leave you any excuse for not writing to me but that of disinclination. You need not think that you are the only one whom I have neglected in the matter of letter-writing. I have been neglectful of all alike. Talcott was the first to be favoured (?) by me and it is but two or three days since I wrote my first letter to him. I promised to write to "Pomp" Woods, and Bridges but have yet written to none of them. They all seem to expect me to open the correspondence for some reason or other, I hardly know why. I suppose, however, that they think my writing powers—my gift of gab—unlimited. Although the vacation is well-nigh half over, I give you fair warning that I shall expect no less than two letters from you before College opens.

And now I proceed to ask the all-important question, *How's Buffalo?* I hope that your correspondence with the fair inhabitant of that fair city flows happily on. Have you yet succeeded in replacing the lost watch ornament?

As you will see by the heading of this letter, I am in Columbia on a visit to my younger sister. I have been here for a week and will leave for home in a few days. The weather has been oppressively warm here but, by keeping quiet and idle I am

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Robert Bridges, June 3, 1921.

managing to keep comparatively comfortable. I believe that you know that I lived here for some four or five years just before I went to Princeton. I feel at home upon coming here where I have quite a large number of acquaintances, some of whom it is very pleasant to meet again. Columbia is the scene of some of my old love adventures of which I have from time to time given you some partial accounts. You may naturally imagine that this place, therefore, recalls some strange memories to my mind. I have made a considerable fool of myself here in times not very long past. The Columbia people have a good deal of the old South Carolina hospitality and hearty warmth of manner and make very kind and pleasant friends. The fair ones especially are most of them free from affectation and pretense. I have just returned from calling on a whole family of girls who are all old acquaintances. They all knew me as a boy and embryonic young man and know me as "Tom." I always enjoy getting among people who know me well enough to throw aside the formal prefix *Mr.*, and call me *Tommie*, simply.

Much of my leisure time I employ in the undignified occupation of romping with the younger of my two bright nephews here. He delights in having me chase him on *all fours*, and I constantly indulge him to the material detriment of my breeches. The little chap has an immense amount of determination housed in his diminutive frame and can rule me with ease. He will be master of those with whom he comes in contact as long as he lives, probably. He has already interrupted me more than once in the writing of this letter and I am finishing it while his morning sleep gives me temporary freedom. I believe I am quite a willing slave, however.

One would not think that this was the same city that it was during the campaign of '76. Hampton has now long been in quiet possession and has administered the government of the state with more ability and success than might have been expected in view of the fact that he is in most respects a very ordinary man. He is certainly no statesman—little more than a rough and honest soldier with a soldier's aptness at orderly administration and the control of the rank and file of his followers. As usual politics is the all-engrossing topic of conversation. Southerners seem born with an interest in public affairs, though it is too often of late a very ignorant interest.

I have not received Woods' scrawl yet nor a letter from Bridges with its quaint caption: "Friend Wilson." I hope soon to hear from you however—the sooner the better.

Your very sincere friend

T. W. WILSON.

Wilson enjoyed the theatre. He was fascinated by *Pinafore*, and sang the airs to his friends. He went to visit a classmate<sup>1</sup> in New York and saw Booth in *Othello* at the matinée, and was so carried away that he went again to see him as *Iago* in the evening. He and his friend Hiram Woods spent all their money on a trip to New York to see *Julius Cæsar*.

He maintained also, and vigorously, all through his college life, his religious interests. No student attended more regularly the class religious meetings on Sunday evenings, nor church services more regularly Sunday mornings, where he sat under Dr. Duryea, "one of the true orators of the pulpit" who "used to conjure with my spirit."<sup>2</sup> "A profoundly religious man," one of his classmates called him.<sup>3</sup>

#### VI. ASPIRATIONS

We have thus a picture of an ardent, enthusiastic, friendly, brilliant, intense young student guided underneath by a deep and serious purpose to make the most out of his life. We find evidences of his high aspirations—the remarkable definiteness and clarity of them—as well as his capacity for devoted friendship, in his account of his "solemn covenant" with his classmate Charles Talcott.<sup>4</sup>

"I remember forming with Charlie Talcott (a class-mate and very intimate friend of mine) a solemn covenant that

<sup>1</sup>William B. Isham to the author.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, April 20, 1884.

<sup>3</sup>Dr. John D. Davis, of the Princeton Theological Seminary, to the author.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Talcott had a notable career which led him to Congress in 1911, but it was cut short by his untimely death.

we would school all our powers and passions for the work of establishing the principles we held in common; that we would acquire knowledge that we might have power; and that we would drill ourselves in all the arts of persuasion, but especially in oratory (for he was a born orator if any man ever was), that we might have facility in leading others into our ways of thinking and enlisting them in our purposes. And we didn't do this in merely boyish enthusiasm, though we were blinded by a very boyish assurance with regard to the future and our ability to mould the world as our hands might please. It was not so long ago but that I can still feel the glow and the pulsations of the hopes and the purposes of that moment—nay, it was not so long ago but that I still retain some of the faith that then prompted me.”<sup>1</sup>

“There was,” writes Robert Bridges, “a certain integrity in his ideal from boy to man that gave his friends a peculiar confidence in his ultimate destiny as a leader of men. It was a jest of his in college which ended ‘when I meet you in the Senate, I’ll argue that out with you.’”<sup>2</sup>

He had all along that instinct, familiar in the youth of men of power, of unusual capacities, of a future—“when I meet you in the Senate”—for which he was to spare no pains or labour in preparation. He was so certain of his powers that he wrote out a number of cards in his own flowing hand:

*Thomas Woodrow Wilson*  
*Senator from Virginia.*<sup>3</sup>

It is singular, however, that in his wildest flights of imagination he seems never to have imagined himself as

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, October 30, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Bridges, *Woodrow Wilson, A Personal Tribute*.

<sup>3</sup>“Once, at Bryn Mawr, we were looking over one of his college books used when he was an undergraduate at Princeton; a card dropped out on which was written, ‘Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Senator from Virginia.’” From memorandum prepared for the author by Mrs. Wilson’s cousin, Mary W. Hoyt.



President of the United States. Secretary of the Navy, yes, and Senator from Virginia, and Governor of Virginia, but never the White House.<sup>1</sup>

One incident of his senior year is of the highest interpretive importance. It represented a kind of crisis in his life—a formal decision which was to govern his conduct on many future occasions where a conflict arose between what he considered a principle, a “settled conviction,” and his desire for success, or his devotion to his society, his organization, his “crowd.” This was the Lynde prize debate between the two famous old societies at Princeton—Whig and Clio. The final debate was one of the noteworthy events of Commencement, and the prize one of the highly regarded honours of the senior class. Wilson was considered by his own Hall—the Whig—and by the college generally, as its outstanding speaker, the man most likely to win. We have evidence that he himself looked forward eagerly to the debate, preparing himself thoroughly upon the announced question, “Free Trade versus a Tariff for Protection.” He had been for some time a convinced free-trader: a disciple of Cobden, who was one of his heroes, and his study of the question sharpened his belief.

Under the rules of the contest, preliminary debates were held in each Hall to select the three speakers who were to appear in the great final contest in June.

On the morning of the preliminary contest, when the lots were drawn, Wilson found that he must defend the tariff side. He arose at once and announced that he was for free trade and could not argue against his convictions, that there would be no force nor sincerity behind what he said. As a result, the three men chosen by Whig Hall were Robert Bridges, M. G. Emery, Jr., and Samuel A. Harlow. Clio chose A. W. Halsey, Peter J. Hamilton, and Chalmers Martin. In the final debate in June, Halsey (Clio) took

<sup>1</sup>As he told Edith Bolling Wilson years afterward.



first prize, Bridges (Whig) second, and Harlow (Whig) third.

By his decision not to enter the preliminaries, young Wilson probably lost a prize that he might, in the judgment of his fellows, easily have won; and he lost not only for himself but for his Hall.

Was he right? Though this was a mere college contest, yet it involved issues often raised at later times in his career. Which was the more important, a man's personal convictions—his intellectual integrity—or his obligations to his friends, his group? Is winning the important thing?

It may be said that this was only a kind of college game, and that he need not have been so squeamish; but to Wilson, with his high aspirations and his intense convictions, to argue for a cause in which he utterly disbelieved was intolerable. Professor Sumner of Yale once expressed exactly the same belief in these words:

"We cannot express opinions which we do not honestly entertain, even in jest, without straining our sense of truth, and losing the delicacy of our sense of right."<sup>1</sup>

One of Wilson's biographers observes that "he refused to take pot luck with his fellows. . . . The feeling of his society, left unprotected by his withdrawal, he did not understand. Nor did the desire of some other boy for a favourite side in the debate ever get to him. If only the gang at Augusta could have larruped the habit of teamwork into him, the 'Happy Warrior' might not have had so many melancholy hours."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in the biography by Harris E. Starr.

<sup>2</sup>William Allen White, *Woodrow Wilson*, p. 74. But White's account is mistaken. Wilson's society had not "made him its debater and staked its game upon him," nor was he "chosen upon the final team." A letter to the author from Robert Bridges (August 19, 1926) says:

"We were all sorry that he withdrew, but he had not been chosen and had not accepted any trust. Any one of us could have dropped out in the same way."

An even stronger statement comes to the author from the Reverend Samuel A. Harlow.

One wonders whether the trouble in America to-day is not due to the fact that the gang *has* "larruped" the intellectual integrity out of its leadership. Everyone wants to play the game to win, to get the immediate prize. The Organization is more important than the truth. The college debate, indeed the Congressional debate growing out of it, too often has become a farcical game in which the debaters themselves have been "larruped by the gang" until they have no positive convictions. Everything must be smooth, politic, expedient. The gang, the machine, is supreme; the man of faith in his own convictions and the courage to stand by them rarer and rarer.

But while he is charged with sacrificing his society by failing to go in against his convictions and win the trivial college prize, this young student has shed an undying fame upon his Hall, his Class, his College, and his Country.

Again and again in after life he made the same decision, and it raised the same questions. The "larruping of the gang" never moved him. His convictions, religious, political, educational, were the essence of the man. If the crowd was with him, well and good; if it was not, he would stand alone. This is not arguing that he was always right, that he did not make serious mistakes, that he might not have been more conciliatory: it is not arguing that he did not change in his beliefs: it is setting forth the kind of man he was—which is the purpose of biography.

He graduated from Princeton in June, 1879, and returned to Wilmington.

## CHAPTER V

### UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

1879-1880

I am proud of Virginia's traditions. . . . I feel as if her great University, where . . . I was trained in the law, were still in no small part my academic home. . . .

*Address before the Virginia State Bar Association, August 4, 1897.*

. . . one cannot but realize how much depends upon the part the lawyer is to play in the future politics of the country.

*Address before the Kentucky Bar Association, July 12, 1911.*

#### I. WILSON DECIDES TO STUDY LAW

WHEN Wilson was graduated from Princeton in 1879, his family had no doubt as to what he should do. He had come of a race of Presbyterian ministers, men of light and leading who considered that their calling was one of supreme devotion and power, who were accustomed to refinements of deference unknown outside the Church. They thought him singularly endowed to shine in the pulpit: but there is no evidence that the youth ever for a moment considered the ministry. In the Old South, the only callings admissible to an intellectual man, besides the ministry, were the other two learned professions, the law, which led naturally into public life, and medicine. In the North and to a far lesser extent in the South, many of the ablest young men of his time were finding an outlet in the expanding West: but Wilson had none of the spirit of the explorer or pioneer. Others were swept into the exultant and truly marvellous development of commerce and industry which followed the

Civil War: but Wilson never had the slightest interest in business of any kind. While he was canny enough in the investment of his small savings, it never entered his head, then or later, to become a money-maker.

There remained the law. He had been fascinated for years with the processes of government by which laws are made, but to law as a profession, for a livelihood, he felt little attraction. What he longed for beyond anything else was public life—politics in the high sense. He felt instinctively that he had gifts of leadership. He knew that he possessed an unusual grasp of the history and theory of political institutions, he had studied the lives of many of the greatest leaders, he had already won his spurs as an orator and debater. He had “a very earnest political creed and very pronounced political ambitions.” And finally he had formed, while yet in college, the “solemn covenant” with Charles Talcott already referred to, that “we would school all our powers and passions for the work of establishing the principles we held in common.”

How then was he to carry out this “solemn covenant”? How was he to acquire leadership in public affairs? It would be a task difficult enough at best for a Southerner and a Democrat, at a time so soon after the Civil War, but if there was any clear way out, it was by the door of the law. The college graduate of twenty-two thought it all out with his customary clarity.

“The profession I chose was politics; the profession I entered was the law. I entered the one because I thought it would lead to the other. It was once the sure road; and Congress is still full of lawyers.”<sup>1</sup>

The utter seriousness of his purpose, as well as the soaring height of his ideals, is well expressed in a letter which he wrote to Charles Talcott only a short time after his

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, October 30, 1883.



graduation from Princeton. He refers here to his "solemn covenant" with his friend:

Wilmington, N. C. July 7th '79

DEAR CHARLIE,

Of course I meant to open our correspondence before this, but various things, some of them indefinable, have led to my delay, until delay has lengthened into tardiness. But for the last week or so I have been feeling far from well—and here at least is *some* excuse,—or rather *explanation*; *friends* need no *excuse*. Since leaving Princeton I have not been in the brightest of moods. The parting after Commencement went harder than I had feared even. It most emphatically and literally *struck in*. I expect you thought it a little queer that I did not some time during Commencement speak to you *definitely* upon the subject which had principally engrossed our thoughts in the correspondence which followed upon your early graduation. I had promised myself an opportunity of doing so when you should return—and yet I didn't. Well, the long and short of the explanation is, *embarrassment*. When I am with anyone in whom I am specially and sincerely interested, the hardest subject for me to broach is just that which is nearest my heart. An unfortunate disposition indeed! I hope to overcome it in time. I can at least speak plainly in writing. I have not yet hit upon any definite plans for the work we promise ourselves, except that we should, I think, lose no opportunity offered us by leisure moments to improve ourselves in *style* and *knowledge*, should leave nothing undone to keep ourselves fresh from the prejudices and free from foolish inaccuracies of those with whom we will constantly be thrown by the necessities of our law practice, in order that when the time comes for us to write and work for a cause we may be able to command a hearing, and may be strong for the struggle which, it is to be hoped, will raise us above the *pettinesses* of our profession. In my daily efforts at composition, and the preparation of my voice for public speaking, I try to keep these things in view. I am thus able to give such exercises more dignity and a thousand times more interest. Without some such definite aim I could not endure them. Write me what you think. I speak thus freely



to *you* because you know me well enough to credit me with sincerity and acquit me of affectation—or mere talk, which amounts to the same thing in essence.

I rec'd a letter from El. Roessle yesterday. He writes a very interesting—a very characteristic—letter. He seems well satisfied with the manner in which he passed the examinations of the Naval pay corps, and is hopeful of an appointment. He has gone with his family to Lake George as usual.

From the rest of the fellows there is as yet nothing but *silence*.

I leave in about a week, in company with my mother and small brother, for the Blue Ridge. Address me (and please write soon) at Highlands, Macon Co., North Carolina (via Walhalla, S. C.). I'll tell you about the region we are to visit when I know more of it myself. It is as yet new ground for me. With much love,

Your sincere friend  
THOS. W. WILSON.

It was with this entirely clear purpose in his mind that young Wilson entered the University of Virginia.<sup>1</sup> Charlottesville was on the main road to Congress.

The University of Virginia in Wilson's time was, as it remains to-day, a uniquely beautiful and interesting place with an atmosphere all its own. It breathes still the spirit of the man who lived only a few miles away upon the hill of Monticello. Not only is Jefferson's presence recalled by statues of him, but one can still see in the little museum in the library the evidences of his buried genius. Here is the manuscript of his grammar of the Anglo-Saxon language, here his pallet with the paints he used still bright upon it, here are numerous relics of his genius as an inventor. One may see the very copies of the

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<sup>1</sup>On the Bursar's Record, a huge leather-bound book signed by generations of students, the name of "Thomas W. Wilson" may be found on page 214, with the date of entrance, October 2, 1879. "Father, Rev. Dr. Jos. R. Wilson, Wilmington, N. C." The second year the signature appears on page 231 but it is now "T. Woodrow Wilson."

New Testament he cut in making up the volume *The Essential Doctrines of Jesus*, published long afterward as *The Thomas Jefferson Bible*. There is the telescope, set upon a tripod, through which he watched from the porch of Monticello the building of the serpentine walls on the campus of the university. He scarcely needed the appeal which he made to Madison in his last pathetic letter—"Take care of me when dead"—for his spirit lives, if nowhere else, in this great institution.

And yet the young Wilson, firm in his convictions, was in those days a critic of Jefferson, thought of himself, indeed, because he believed so intensely in national unity, as "somewhat of a Federalist." He never even visited Monticello—a short walk for an energetic student—until long after he had left the university. He was not to "come around to Jefferson" for many years.

## II. UNIVERSITY LIFE AT VIRGINIA

When Wilson was a student, the university had not recovered from the exhaustion of the Civil War. The student body numbered only 328; the teaching staff was small; but there were giants in those days. To the end of his life, Woodrow Wilson considered Dr. John B. Minor, who was then head of the law department, one of the most remarkable men he had ever come in contact with; the greatest teacher next to his father he ever had, a scholar, a leader of men, a true gentleman. Minor and Dr. Stephen O. Southall were in themselves the law department of the university, teaching their own classes, writing most of their own textbooks.

Under these two men, the students in the law department, who numbered seventy-nine in the year that Wilson entered, were subjected to the stoutest kind of intellectual discipline. Minor wrote this maxim for the college catalogue:

"He who is not a good lawyer when he comes to the bar, is not a good one afterwards."

He goes on to set up his standard of discipline for the student:

"Thought is requisite as well as reading; for the purpose of thought, there must be time to *Digest*, as well as the *Industry* to acquire. One cannot expect to gorge himself with law as a Boa Constrictor does with masses of food, and then digest it afterwards; the process of assimilation must go on, if it is to proceed healthfully and beneficially, at the same time with the reception of knowledge. So the athlete judges who wishes to train the physical man to the most vigorous development, and the intellectual athlete cannot do better than to imitate the example."

The capstone of the law course in those days, as in all the colleges of law, was the moot court of which Wilson was chosen judge in his second year, an honour coveted beyond any other.

Wilson roomed in a house on the outskirts of the university<sup>1</sup> which commanded a view across the open fields toward the cemetery where the forgotten worthies of the university were buried and where rested the Confederate dead. On his way up from his classes to his room, he passed the house where President Monroe once lived. Here he spent his first year. In the second year, he came to a room much nearer the centre of university life, at 31 West Range. Only a few doors away, at Number 13, once lived Edgar Allan Poe, and a few doors farther along, in Room 37, he could call upon his bosom friend and companion, R. Heath Dabney, who is now Dean of Graduate Studies in the University of Virginia. The rooms were small and bare, heated only by fireplaces, the soft coal for which was kept in a box outside the window. The students of the University of Virginia have placed a tablet over

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<sup>1</sup>Room 158, House F.

the door of the room in West Range, with the following wording:

In This Room Lived  
WOODROW WILSON  
1879-1881  
President of the United States  
1913-1921  
Justum ac Tenacem  
Proprio Siti Virum  
Erected By  
Students Of The University  
Of Virginia  
1922.<sup>1</sup>

There were in the law school at that time, a number of men of unusual ability: William Cabell Bruce, now United States Senator from Maryland; R. Heath Dabney and William Echols, Jr., both of whom are now professors at the University of Virginia; Richard E. Byrd of Virginia; LeRoy Percy, afterward United States Senator from Mississippi; and John Bassett Moore, distinguished international lawyer.

Wilson entered the university with something more than the usual reputation. He was a Southerner with a distinguished father and uncle, a graduate of Princeton, and his article on "Cabinet Government in the United States," published only two months before in such a notable journal as the *International Review*, lay on the table in the university library. His searching criticism of Congress had attracted no little attention in the academic world, and was regarded as an astonishing production for so young a man. Besides all this, he "carried himself with an air of quiet distinction," he had "rare charm and courtesy of manner."

We find his fellow students drawing him immediately

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Wilson did not room in West Range during 1879, and did not continue in this room after December, 1880.



into many important college activities. As was quite to be expected, he joined the Jefferson debating society which, with its rival, the Washington, occupied the centre of intellectual life in the university. He became at once a member of the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity.

We find him also in the chapel choir and the glee club, "warbling serenades under the windows of the fair ones." And on December 20th, though nothing at all of an athlete, he was chosen, as an outstanding leader in the university, with a reputation as a speaker, to present the medals at the close of the university field day. Here he made a speech which delighted and convulsed his hearers. He strung together a farrago of utter nonsense prompted by his friend Dabney, added a dash of mock heroics, and closed with a real bit of serious oratory. One of the verses he recited to the assembled athletes and their friends was this:

'Twas in the gloaming, by the fair Wyoming,  
That I left my darling, many years ago;  
And memory tender brings her back in splendour  
With her cheeks of roses and her brow of snow.

But where in thunder is she now, I wonder?  
Oh, my soul, be quiet, and, my sad heart, hush!  
Under the umbrella of another fellow  
Ah! I think I see her, paddling through the slush!<sup>1</sup>

The *University of Virginia Magazine* thus comments: "When all was over Mr. Wilson in that happy manner so preëminently possessed by that gentleman made a perfect little medal delivery speech." From that moment, young Wilson was a preëminent figure in the university.

### III. WILSON'S PASSION FOR HIS OWN STUDIES

Wilson's passion for his own studies, developed at Princeton, continued unabated. He even considered his

<sup>1</sup>Dean R. Heath Dabney to the author.

law courses, which he came to the university to pursue, unutterable bores. He must go through them in order to become a lawyer, and thus enter politics, but he never pretended that he enjoyed them.

"The Law is indeed a hard task-master. I am struggling, hopefully but with not *over*-much courage, through its intricacies, and am swallowing the vast mass of its technicalities with as good a grace and as straight a face as an offended palate will allow. I have, of course no idea of abandoning this study because of its few unpleasant features. Anyone would prove himself a fool, to be sincerely pitied by all wise men, who should expect to find any work that is worth doing easily done, accomplished without pain or worry; who should turn away from hard study to pursue disappointment in some other direction. Still one may be permitted an occasional complaint, if for no other purpose than to relieve his feelings. To relieve my feelings, therefore, I wish now to record the confession that I am most terribly bored by the noble study of Law sometimes, though in the main I am thoroughly satisfied with my choice of a profession. . . . This excellent thing, the Law, gets as monotonous as that other immortal article of food, *Hash*, when served with such endless frequency. I'm trying to do some writing, however, at odd intervals and do scraps of reading as I can, and hope thus to tide over these months of preparation for practice with profit and success."<sup>1</sup>

But his reading in his own subjects—what a different matter! Here no labour was too intense. When he entered the university, his uncle, James Bones, who had early become fond of Tommy Wilson, presented him with Mills's *Political Economy*, Chitty's *Blackstone*, an edition of *The Federalist*, and other standard works.<sup>2</sup> If he required

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Charles Talcott, December 31, 1879.

<sup>2</sup>These books were treasured by Wilson all his life.

other authors he had the run of Dr. Minor's fine library. We are fortunate also in knowing exactly what books he used from the university library, for every student signed the record, kept in a huge volume, for each book he drew. In those days, Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Mills, Macaulay, Longfellow, were new writers, and we find a wide reading of these books by the students in general. Probably the greatest reader in the entire university, at that time, was young Wilson's first cousin, James H. Woodrow of Columbia, South Carolina, son of Professor James Woodrow. He had the keen intellectual interests of the Woodrow family and a gargantuan taste for every kind of book, both English and French. Another great reader was William Cabell Bruce, and another, John Bassett Moore, who was appointed years afterward by President Wilson as Counsellor of the State Department. Mr. Wilson's reading was curiously circumscribed. What he was interested in was history, orations, the lives of leaders, and poetry. Here is a list of the books he drew:

November 4, 1879	Wirt's <i>Henry</i>
November 13, 1879	Jebb's <i>Attic Orators</i>
November 18, 1879	Wirt's <i>Henry</i>
November 21, 1879	Stubb's <i>Constitutional England</i>
December 6, 1879	Stubb's <i>Constitutional England</i> renewed
December 13, 1879	Shelley's poems (which he overkept so long that he was fined fiftycents)
March 30, 1880	Newman's <i>Chats</i>
April 3, 1880	Lecky's <i>Eighteenth Century</i>
April 14, 1880	Parts I and II, <i>Congressional Globe</i> , 1855-1856; <i>Executive Documents</i> , Volume I, 1845-1846
April 15, 1880	<i>Congressional Globe</i> , First Session, Thirtieth Congress
May 24, 1880	Goodrich's <i>British Eloquence</i>
November 30, 1880	Parson's <i>Contracts</i>

We have a glimpse of him, in the memory of a fellow student, on a long walk, alone, with Shelley's poems in his pocket. We also hear of him tramping off toward Monticello to find a quiet wood where he can declaim his Attic orators.

What was it that drove him so unremittingly to toil that was quite outside of any requirement either of his course at the university or for his practice of his profession? Is not the "sense of preparation for anticipated greatness" the surest early mark of the man of genius? He himself remarked it, marvelled at it:

"... those indistinct plans of which we used to talk grow on me daily, until a sort of calm confidence of great things to be accomplished has come over me which I am puzzled to analyse the nature of. I can't tell whether it is a mere figment of my own inordinate vanity, or a deep-rooted determination which it will be within my power to act up to."<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. THE ORATOR AND LEADER

Wilson also plunged into activities quite outside of the college curriculum. Shy as he was and difficult as he found human contacts—until the ice was broken—he was irresistibly impelled to organize, inspire, and lead his fellows. It was as inevitable at the University of Virginia as it had been in the barn loft back of his father's Manse at Augusta, or at Princeton in later years, that he should be found getting a group together to discuss public questions, and rising at once to a foremost place in the established debating societies. It was a fine group of eager young orators and budding statesmen which met of an evening at "Old Jeff." Wilson had formally joined the society on November 18th. Four days later, he was elected secretary; and there are many pages of his beautiful handwriting in the

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Charles Talcott, May 20, 1880.



record—a great contrast to the scrawling haste which preceded his régime. On the first night of his attendance, we find the society debating the portentous question, “Is the extinction of Democracy in America a probable event?” which these youths—in the South, so soon after reconstruction, with Hayes, in their opinion, sitting quite wrongfully in the President’s chair—decided in the affirmative.

On March 6, 1880, Wilson delivered his oration on John Bright. By this time he had attained such a reputation that the entire college community was eager to hear him speak. The ladies of the university petitioned to be present and there was a feminine audience in the solemn precincts of the hall for the first time.

“They began to come in shortly before seven o’clock and soon so many of the seats were occupied by the ‘calico’ and their escorts, that those students who had not been prudent enough to come early were obliged either to stand up or to squat tailor fashion in the aisle. Wilson took ‘John Bright’ for the subject of his oration and handled it in a manner which showed much thought and an accurate knowledge of modern English politics. He was listened to with much attention. The oration was received with deserved and hearty applause.”<sup>1</sup>

The oration was published in full in the March number of the university *Magazine* and added greatly in the reading to Wilson’s reputation.<sup>2</sup> It is indeed, judged by any standard, a remarkable production. It exhibits an unusual grasp of English politics and English leadership, and sets forth with a maturity that is magisterial, and a finished if somewhat flowery grace of expression, the essentials of good oratory, true liberalism, and great statesmanship. It is full of scintillating passages:

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<sup>1</sup>From the *University of Virginia Magazine*.

<sup>2</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 43-59.

"Tolerance is an admirable intellectual gift: but it is of little worth in politics."

"Absolute identity with one's cause is the first and great condition of successful leadership. It is that which makes the statesman's plans clear-cut and decisive, his purposes unhesitating—it is that which makes him a leader of States and a maker of history."

It was not, however, in these lessons from the distant drama of British politics that the oration was most astonishing. He was safe enough in saying what he pleased about Bright and Cobden and Gladstone. But the oration also struck home with a vivid comment upon the most dangerous issue of the times: the Civil War and the attitude of the South toward it. He must have known that it was full of dynamite, but he set forth, with the courage of complete conviction, views that many politicians dared not express a quarter of a century later. He might easily have omitted any justification of John Bright's opposition to the Southern Confederacy, but he preferred to meet the issue squarely.

"I yield to no one precedence in love for the South. But *because* I love the South, I rejoice in the failure of the Confederacy. Suppose that secession had been accomplished? Conceive of this Union as divided into two separate and independent sovereignties! To the seaports of her Northern neighbour the Southern Confederacy could have offered no equals; with her industries she could have maintained no rivalry; to her resources she could have supplied no parallel. The perpetuation of slavery would, beyond all question, have wrecked our agricultural and commercial interests, at the same time that it supplied a fruitful source of irritation abroad and agitation within. We cannot conceal from ourselves the fact that slavery was enervating our Southern society and exhausting to Southern energies. We cannot conceal from ourselves the

fact that the Northern union would have continued stronger than we, and always ready to use her strength to compass our destruction. With this double certainty, then, of *weakness* and *danger*, our future would have been more than dark—it would have been inevitably and overwhelmingly disastrous. Even the damnable cruelty and folly of reconstruction was to be preferred to helpless independence. All this I can see at the same time that I recognize and pay loving tribute to the virtues of the leaders of secession, to the purity of their purposes, to the righteousness of the cause which they thought they were promoting—and to the immortal courage of the soldiers of the Confederacy.”

Such an address as this necessarily made more than a local impression. It was commented upon in the newspapers of the state. In the following April number of the *Magazine*, Wilson had a virile and interesting essay on Gladstone which combined the same sound knowledge of English affairs with philosophical comments upon statesmanship, but without the pointed reference to American affairs which vitalized the essay on Bright. It remains a remarkably just estimate and criticism of Gladstone’s career.<sup>1</sup>

But the most dramatic event of Wilson’s university experience was yet to come. A debate between the two outstanding leaders of the university, both with reputations as orators, was arranged for April 2d. It was destined to become one of the notable collegiate events in the history of the institution. The subject proposed was this: “Is the Roman Catholic element in the United States a menace to American institutions?”

William Cabell Bruce was to support the affirmative and Wilson the negative. So great was the expectation aroused by this gladiatorial encounter that the meeting

<sup>1</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 63–88.

was transferred from the rooms of the Jefferson Society to the larger hall of the Washington Society. Visitors were attracted from outside the university. One of them was Wilson's devoted uncle, James Bones, who came over from Staunton, Virginia, and, knowing his nephew's nervousness in speaking before his relatives, slipped into the back of the crowded room, where he remained undiscovered until afterward.<sup>1</sup> According to everyone who heard it, the debate was an extraordinary performance.<sup>2</sup>

Wilson began by declaring that he had nothing to do with Roman Catholicism as a religion: "We deal with it as a policy." And he summed up his reasons for believing that Catholicism was not a menace to our institutions:

"He did not anticipate the victory of Rome because the danger was proclaimed and we forearmed; because of the historical prejudices against Roman Catholic authority which were peculiar to our race; because of our spreading and enlarging and strengthening common-school system which is throwing about us the safeguards of enlightenment; because of the unassailable defences of *self-government*. Our liberties are safe until the memories and experiences of the past are blotted out and the *Mayflower* with its band of pilgrims forgotten; until our public-school system has fallen into decay and the nation into

<sup>1</sup>James Bones's journey recalls a somewhat parallel circumstance in the life of another youthful orator, Patrick Henry. In 1763, when only twenty-seven years of age, Henry was engaged to plead against the clergy in the Parson's Cause. On the day appointed for the argument before the jury, the Reverend Patrick Henry, the young man's uncle, came to court to hear Henry make his *début*. When the latter saw his uncle approach, he was filled with regret and said:

"... you know that I have never yet spoken in public, and I fear I shall be too much overawed by your presence to be able to do my duty to my clients; besides, sir, I shall be obliged to say some *hard things* of the clergy, and I am very unwilling to give pain to your feelings."

His uncle reproved him for having engaged in the cause, but, yielding to Henry's pleading, entered his carriage again and returned home. William Wirt, *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>2</sup>Bruce and Wilson were supported by Abney and Horner, the former of whom became a prominent lawyer in South Carolina and the latter Bishop of Western North Carolina.



ignorance; until legislators have resigned their functions to ecclesiastical powers and their prerogatives to priests.”<sup>1</sup>

A friend who was present thus writes of one of the incidents:

“As indicative of Brother Wilson’s self-possession and poise even as a young man it is recalled that during the delivery of this remarkable speech the flame of the oil lamp on the desk began to flare up and then to smoke so that the speaker might easily have been embarrassed. On the contrary, he quietly blew out the lamp and proceeded with his address without a moment’s disturbance.”<sup>2</sup>

When the debate was concluded, the judges found themselves unable to award the medal as between the two leading speakers: and finally, after a delay of several months, awarded two medals, one to Wilson as the best orator, and one to Bruce as the best debater.

#### V. REVISING ANOTHER CONSTITUTION

Sooner or later, we should expect to discover Wilson looking into the constitution of the Jefferson Society. From the time when he was a lad of twelve or thirteen in Augusta, organizing the Lightfoots and writing out the rules of order, we find him making or remaking constitutions—at Davidson, at Princeton for the little debating club he himself organized, as well as for the Whig Society—and now, having been elected president of the Jefferson Society,<sup>3</sup> the first thing he did was to give “notice that he would at some future time introduce a resolution to appoint a committee for revising our constitution.” We shall find him later doing the same thing at Johns Hopkins and at Wesleyan; we shall find him deeply interested in seeing

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<sup>1</sup>From the *University of Virginia Magazine*, April, 1880. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>Charles W. Kent, in the *University of Virginia Magazine*, December, 1912.

<sup>3</sup>October 9, 1880.

what can be done with the antiquated constitution of the State of New Jersey; and finally, at Paris, we shall discover him working out a new covenant under which the nations of the earth may dwell together in harmony.

So infectious was Wilson's own interest in the new constitution of the Jefferson Society that we find most of the meetings for many weeks devoted to the discussion of its principles, although there was a pause in which the members were called upon to debate the two subjects in which their president was most interested: the tariff, and the feasibility of adapting the British scheme of ministerial responsibility to the political system of the United States. Apparently, the society had become quite firmly dominated by the interests of its brilliant young president. The constitution was finally adopted, and the *Magazine* remarks that it "reflects great credit in every respect on its framers, Messrs. T. W. Wilson, Andrews and Lefevre."

Matters such as these were no mere "game" with Wilson, for he took them seriously, working as diligently upon the revision of a society constitution, an oration, or a debate, as he would have done if he had been in Congress. He studied constitutions, read history—Stubb's *Constitutional England*, Lecky's *Eighteenth Century*, Sir Henry Maine, and the like: and he practised his oratory assiduously. We find him even joining a special elocution class conducted by Robert Fulton.

During all of his years of preparation, Wilson's interest in current politics, however quiet, was intense. Astonishment was expressed in 1910 and 1912 that such a "cloistered student" should be able to step so confidently upon the political stage, and not only grasp the issues and problems with a masterly hand, but dominate the seasoned political leaders. There was in reality nothing surprising about it. Wilson had, all his life long, been a passionate student of actual political affairs, not only in America, but

in England, and to a lesser degree in continental Europe. In 1880, while a student at Virginia, we find him watching closely the troubled events which led up to Garfield's election. That he was already thinking clearly of some of the dangers of the American political situation—for example, of the rottenness of the convention system—is evident in his letters to his friend Charles Talcott:

"I was very much obliged for your description of the Conkling Convention for the nomination of delegates for Chicago—I was about to say that I *enjoyed* it: but that would not have been true. One can never enjoy reading of anything which is his country's curse. But I don't believe that such a state of things will be tolerated much longer. You know this convention system is not so old as one would be led to suppose from the amount of mischief it has worked. The country is, I hopefully believe, gradually waking to a full knowledge—and hence an unutterable disgust of its methods—and things are rapidly ripening for a radical change which will soon be imperatively demanded. Let us hope that the change will be for the better. I believe that it will, if our English blood be not altogether corrupted by the infusion of foreign elements. The more open and notorious these corrupt methods of party management, the sooner the deliverance, and the more tremendous the indictment against them."<sup>1</sup>

Just before the election of 1880, in which Hancock polled almost as many votes as Garfield for the Presidency, Wilson wrote:

"Yes, my interest in politics, so far from having abated, seems keener than ever, perhaps because my rustication has for so many weeks shut me off from all accurate knowledge of the course political events were taking. You ask me to write you my ideas on the present condition of politics; but I am inclined to think that nothing but the power

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<sup>1</sup>May 20, 1880.

of prophecy would enable one to throw any *light* on this subject just at present. I believe that we are nearing the close of a period of *transition*, and what exactly is to come I do not suppose that any man would be able to say. I firmly believe that the Republican party, as a party, is doomed to speedy death. Did you read Lyman Trumbull's big speech, delivered in Ill. this Summer? It's quite an able thing of its kind and fully repays perusal. Trumbull was, you know, before the war came on, a Democrat. When the war came, he acted with the Republicans: since the war he has returned to his former allegiance. In the speech to which I refer he enters into a somewhat elaborate review of his conduct by way of explanation and self-justification—and self-*glorification*; and it is in the course of this review that he brings out the striking and instructive fact, that the Democratic party to-day stands just where the Republicans stood before the war, advocates of identically the same principles, representatives of exactly the same—or, at least, very similar—purposes.

“Meanwhile, the Republican party has been going through not only a process of transformation which has proved a process of degradation, but also through a process of disintegration. We now have, therefore, the strange and ominous spectacle of, on the one side, a party departed utterly from the principles of its one-time greatest leaders, at war with itself, its only creed one of hatred for a section of their own country and their own people, and about to have torn from it its last title to regard—the possession of power:—on the other side, a party, turned from its early beliefs, allying itself, in its pursuit of power, with every damnable heresy—with Greenbackers as with protectionists—whose only claim to respect is that it is less impure than its opponent, whose chief recommendation is that its leader is pure, upright, able, and resolute! If this be a true picture, how can one help believing that



such a state of things is premonitory of some great change to come—only the confusion of the elements which precedes a great change of weather?”<sup>1</sup>

All of Wilson's independent activities, his reading, his debates, his writing, his study of oratory and public speaking, all these, piled upon his courses in the law—and they were no joke under that fierce disciplinarian, Dr. Minor—were soon to prove too much for the somewhat frail body of the young man. He drove himself too hard, and this, with the notoriously poor living at the university boarding houses, broke him down completely in the early winter of 1880. He left with the greatest regret; and his position in the university had become such that the *Magazine* found the occasion—almost unprecedented in connection with the departure of a student—to say of him:

“We regret to announce that Mr. T. W. Wilson, orator to the Jeff. Society, 1880, has left the University on account of his health. Last session he distinguished himself as a writer and debater. His articles on ‘John Bright’ and ‘Gladstone’ were complimented very highly by the *Magazine* committee. His able speech at our last commencement pleased all, and from our distinguished orator, ex-Gov. Hubbard, it elicited the remark, ‘That young man will be an honour to his State.’ This session he gave most of his attention to the study of law, and was looked upon by the whole class as one of ‘the surest men for B. L.’ We sincerely hope that he may speedily recover.”

This high regard of his fellows, his almost unchallenged leadership, was due at Virginia, as at Princeton, not merely to his brilliant qualities of intellect: he was genuinely liked as well as admired. Here again we find fellow students speaking of his “charm,” his “fine courtesy,” and “affability.” He was looked upon as a natural leader. At one time, a circus came to Charlottesville, and a familiar row

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Charles Talcott, October 11, 1880.

between the students and the roustabouts took place, followed by an excited meeting of the entire student body. Hot-heads among them were for proceeding to the circus grounds to "wipe them up." Just as the excitement reached its height the slender figure of young Wilson arose, standing upon a chair, with hand lifted until there was silence.

"I have listened," he said, "with much attention to the plan you have outlined to whip the circus. I want to make a few remarks on how not to do it."

He made a powerful but quiet speech that "had the effect of sending the students all quietly home to bed."<sup>1</sup>

#### VI. FRIENDSHIPS AND FIRST LOVE AFFAIR

Here at Virginia, as at Princeton, we find Wilson making among his classmates and fellow students friends who were to stand with him, through every fortune, to the end of his life or theirs—such men as R. H. Dabney, Charles W. Kent, and others. Wilson and Dabney kept up a correspondence, often ardently intimate, for more than forty years. As students, they took long walks together, read aloud, and at one time engaged in a contest to see which could call the other by the more opprobrious title. After many attempts, it was mutually decided that the worst name that Dabney could apply to Wilson was "illimitable idiot," and the worst name that Wilson could append to Dabney was "thou very ass"! Twenty-two years later their friendship was still so undimmed that Dabney could write to Wilson:

"Who would have 'thunk' it?! Who could have guessed that an Illimitable Idiot would ever be selected as the President of a great university?!"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from S. J. Shepherd, a fellow student, to Woodrow Wilson, November 6, 1914.

<sup>2</sup>July 20, 1902.



R. HEATH DABNEY, WILSON'S CLOSEST  
FRIEND AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA



EDWARD IRELAND RENICK,  
WOODROW WILSON'S LAW PARTNER AT ATLANTA





And thirty-two years later, after the hot political fight in Wilson's behalf in Virginia, Dabney could telegraph:

"Hip, hip, hurrah! Your Virginia friends are shouting with joy."<sup>1</sup>

And forty-two years later, not long before his death, Wilson could write to Dabney in the old terms of friendship:

"The faith and affection of an old friend like yourself afford me the sort of refreshment and support which I most need in these days of slow recuperation."<sup>2</sup>

If it is of ample record that Wilson could love, could make undying friendships, he could dislike heartily or despise utterly. There was always the intense Scotch-Irishman in him: all hot, all cold. He and his rival at the university, William Cabel Bruce, easily struck sparks and were on terms of a severe politeness. And he could remark savagely of a student who had made some pretence to be an orator that he "suggested to me a greasy junk-shop Jew who had been partially washed and renovated and oiled that he might appear to less overwhelming disadvantage among decent people."<sup>3</sup>

Wilson's friendships during his university life were by no means confined to his fellow students. There were still other and more serious social attractions. Across the mountains, at Staunton, Wilson's birthplace, several of his fascinating cousins were at school at the Augusta Female Seminary,<sup>4</sup> which was housed in the old church where his father had once occupied the pulpit and he himself had been baptized. It was easy enough to slip over the mountain to spend a week-end and return in time for his first Monday lecture. One of the gifted students in the seminary was Harriet

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<sup>1</sup>November 9, 1912, after Wilson's election to the Presidency of the United States.

<sup>2</sup>December 29, 1922.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to R. Heath Dabney, May 31, 1881.

<sup>4</sup>The name was changed in 1895 to the Mary Baldwin Seminary.

Woodrow—"Hattie"—the daughter of his mother's much-loved older brother Thomas, who lived in Chillicothe, Ohio. Young Wilson fell precipitately in love with her, and scandalized his other cousins by his vociferous cheering at a concert where she played. He went to spend the Christmas holidays in 1879 at Staunton with his uncle, James Bones, and here the affair with his cousin made rapid progress. We have a glimpse of this holiday in a letter from James Bones to Wilson's mother, written January 13, 1880:

"We had a quiet but very pleasant Christmas & our chief enjoyment was in having dear Tommie with us for a week. He captivated all our hearts most completely, being such a manly, sensible, affectionate fellow. You certainly have great reason to be proud of your big boy. His views of life are so just, his aims so high & his heart so full of affectionateness & kindness that he must succeed. We hope to see him frequently as he can easily run over Saturday afternoon & return by the early Monday train in time for his lecture. He has promised to come often. Hattie spent the week with us & she & Jessie & Tommy had nice times together."

A somewhat ardent correspondence with Hattie continued during the following year and a half, and, in the summer of 1881, Wilson visited his cousin's family at Chillicothe, made his suit, and was promptly refused.

#### VII. THE LONELY STUDENT

Wilson's breakdown in health in December, 1880, his forced retirement from the scene of his triumphs and the pursuit of his absorbing studies at the University of Virginia, was a source of deep discouragement to him. We hear him asking despondently, "How can a man with a weak body ever arrive anywhere?" He thinks of the magnificent physique of his hero Gladstone—and of Burke

and Webster. Yet he is never the man to give way to despair. It is only another obstacle to meet and overcome; and within a month he is settled in a study in the Manse at Wilmington hard at work upon his law books. He writes to his friend Dabney:

"As for my health, I now know that to leave the University was the most prudent step I could have taken. My doctor found my digestive organs seriously out of gear and has confirmed me in the belief that, had I remained at the University and there continued to neglect systematic medical treatment of myself, I might have confirmed myself in dyspepsia and have fixed on myself a very uncomfortable future.

"But, despite the fact that I am still far from well, and that a wretched spell of weather has prevented my rapid recovery, I am again steadily at work on the law, and am making very satisfactory progress with it. I find that, having gone so far under competent guidance, I now know the land-marks of the subject quite familiarly enough to enable me to explore it with safety and advantage; and I am naturally very much encouraged to find that I can travel so well alone—or, at least, work with so little *travail*, if you'll excuse the pun!"<sup>1</sup>

His feeling toward the friends at Charlottesville and his regret over his inability to go on with the work are expressed in the same letter:

"I miss you and the other boys of  $\Phi\psi$  more than you would believe, Heath; and when Saturday night comes, I find myself wishing that I could drop in at the Jeff. again. Whom have you elected G. P. in my stead? and what was the ultimate fate of the new Constitution in the Jeff? To what fate did the medal question come? Are there any new candidates for any of the honours of the Society in the

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<sup>1</sup>February 1, 1881.

field? Tell me all you can about the frat. and about the Jeff., when you write—which do as soon as ever you can. I’m fairly hungry for news from you and about you, and about the rest of the boys. Remember me to all my friends by name—and especially to Blackstone, to whom give a special message of love. If my determination to leave had not been so suddenly arrived at and my preparations in consequence necessarily so hasty, I could not easily have forgiven myself for failing to see him to tell him good-bye. Tell Charlie Kent that I shall look eagerly for a letter from him; give my love to George Preston; and assure Joe Blair that, away from him, I would scarcely think that I existed were it not for the reflection, ‘*cogo, ergo sum.*’

“You see, I shall expect all the *news* to come from *you*: from me there’s none to come, except that I’m cultivating the acquaintance of some of the Wilmington girls, and am occasionally figuring in private musical entertainments as one just risen in the firmament of *vocal stars*. Altogether, however, I am passing a very hum-drum student’s life. . . .

“Excuse this rambling budget of messages and believe me, with much love,

“Your sincere friend,

“T. WOODROW WILSON.”

Wilson was in after years extremely fond of the University of Virginia and was highly regarded there. It is interesting to note that when the trustees decided in 1898 to change Jefferson’s system of a governing board and elect a president, Woodrow Wilson was the first man to be considered. But he declined the position—three times offered to him—writing his reasons to Dabney for doing so in November, 1902.<sup>1</sup>

He now buckled down for a year and a half<sup>2</sup> of lonely but intense study.

<sup>1</sup>Philip Alexander Bruce, *History of the University of Virginia*, Vol. V, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>December, 1880, to June, 1882.



On March 22d we have his report of his health, his work, and his pleasures to his friend Dabney:

“Time is treating me kindly, though I am still far from feeling complete confidence in my stomach’s good behaviour. I, having nothing harder or more disagreeable to do than read law according to my own devices, am much happier, ‘I trow’, than ye poor slaves who have the torments of measles and the irritations of special examinations, postponed to suit others’ convenience, to undergo with what equanimity ye can simulate. I spend some portions of the leisure I make for myself, by close economy of time in the matter of study, in the company of fair damsels who, if they are not always good talkers or often skilled in entertaining, are at least uniformly good listeners and are generally well enough disposed to submit themselves to be entertained by a well-meaning young man who exerts himself to sustain a much larger reputation for intelligence than he has any right to. I am prevented from bestowing too much attention upon any one of these interesting creatures whom I may find a trifle more charming than the rest by the wholesome fear of my young brother, whose soul is never more at ease, and whose spirits are never higher than when he has the opportunity, for which he is constantly and slyly in wait, of discoursing of the exhibitions of my supposed preferences.

“But, while not neglecting the privileges of society—so to speak—I am the more while a slave to the seductions of literature. As I wrote to Charley, I’ve lately sought a new introduction to Fox. I have just completed Trevelyan’s *‘Early History of Charles James Fox’* and have been more entirely captivated by it than by anything I have read since Macaulay, his uncle. The book would be more properly entitled an history of the early portion of the reign of Geo. III; but still there runs through its wonder-

fully vivid description of the men and the society and the politics of that dark period of Eng. history a clear and complete enough narrative of the early life of Fox to furnish me, at least, with much new light concerning that remarkable man's career and to supply me with materials for an entirely new estimate of his character.—But I won't tire you with a recital of my crude opinions about a book you may not care to read. If you would follow my advice, however, you will not let another vacation pass without reading it every word. I know it would repay you. . . .

“I'll hoard the rest of my empty items till next time. Write me letters full of gossip about yourself and the boys and the Jeff and everything else pertaining to our one-time walk and conversation. With much love to the boys, yourself not excluded,

“Yours sincerely  
“T. W. WILSON”

Wilson's life at home in Wilmington was not happy. His health was poor, and the future looked doubtful, if not dark. Yet he continued with his reading, practised his oratory, corresponded with his friends. We find him writing to Dabney in April, a letter full of eager questions and comments regarding life in the university, between the lines of which one can read his own regret at not being able to take a part in the fray. He also records his intellectual activities:

“I've turned professor of Latin since my return home. There are no schools here of any worth at all, and, consequently, my younger brother has to be instructed at home. I have charge at present of his classical education and find the exercise of teaching an excellent training for myself. I had an idea that I knew a good deal about Latin until I came to teach it. Of late teaching the grammar has not been my only exercise in Latin, however. I've been

reading Trollope's recently issued life of Cicero and have of course made it a point to read most of the passages in Cicero's works to which Mr. T. refers *passim*. Of course Cicero is easy to translate, but I experience the consequences of three years' neglect of Latin even in reading him. My principal trouble is, of course, a loss of a Latin *vocabulary*. But facility of translation is rapidly coming back to me. As for Trollope's work it is simply charming—as vivid and entertaining and instructive as Trevelyan's *Fox*."

It is evident also that he is eagerly following the news of world politics. He gloats in the same letter over the end of Beaconsfield:

"I see by this morning's paper that the schemings of my friend Beaconsfield are at last at an end. His death has not inclined me to any *Jamesian* snuffles. The old fox could not have lasted much longer and I'm prone to feel only relief at his departure. From many things I've recently seen afloat in the papers I am apt to think, too, that the regret of the tories at his loss (?) will be only of the lips!"

And he winds up the letter with his love to his old friends:

"Give much love to Charley, Harry, Pat, Geo. P., Hunter, and my other friends. I think of them much and often.

"Do write as often as you can, Heath, to

"Your sincere friend and bro in  $\Phi\psi$

"T. WOODROW WILSON."<sup>1</sup>

He is also hard at work, as usual, with his elocution. He has a chart in his room giving diagrams of appropriate

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<sup>1</sup>April 20, 1881.

gestures for the expression of various emotions. He tells his cousin Hattie:

"I practise *elocution* hard and systematically every day. I intend to spare no trouble in gaining complete command of my voice in reading and speaking."<sup>1</sup>

In all these letters it will be observed that he refers, if at all, to the actual study of the law as a profession only with distaste. He never expresses his regret at not having his degree from the university; he is too much absorbed in his own studies.

But his life is by no means all work. His letters are full of accounts of the coming and going of relatives, of "musicals" in which he delights to sing, and occasionally a church picnic, which he abominates.

We also get various glimpses of his opinions of that time—always sharp and positive. One of them exhibits his attitude toward the hatreds aroused by the Civil War:

"To-day, the 10th, is 'Decoration Day' with us—that is, it is the day on which the ladies of the '*Ladies' Memorial Association*' conduct the now empty ceremony of decorating the graves of the Confederate dead. It is a day of regrets for me; not of the same sort of regrets that are supposed to engage the thoughts of others, however. My regret is, that there should be any such ceremonious decoration of these graves. I think that anything that tends to revive or perpetuate the bitter memories of the war is wicked folly. I would, of course, wish to see the graves of the Confederate soldiers kept in order with all loving care. But all the parade and speech-making, and sentimentality of 'Decoration Day' are, I think, exceedingly unwise."<sup>2</sup>

His comment on Longfellow has in it the unintentional juice of irony:

<sup>1</sup>April 22, 1881.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Harriet Woodrow, May 10, 1881.



"I was delighted to find that I had been so fortunate in my choice as to send you the poems of your favourite poet. I have a very slight acquaintance indeed with Longfellow's writings; and I must confess that it was the beauty of the little volume that attracted me rather than its contents."<sup>1</sup>

He spent part of that summer with his uncle's family at Chillicothe, and, as already narrated, Hattie finally refused his ardent suit. It is after his return from this visit that we find him signing his name for the first time, "Woodrow Wilson." After going through all the permutations and combinations of "Tommy" and "Tom," "T. Wilson," "Thos. W. Wilson," "T. W. Wilson," and "T. Woodrow Wilson," the last of "Tommy" drops away—sacrificed on the altar of euphony. Thereafter throughout his life he never signed anything but "Woodrow Wilson."

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Harriet Woodrow, January 19, 1881.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LAWYER

1882-1883

His university career over, Bagehot did what so many thousands of young graduates before him had done,—he studied for the bar; and then, having prepared himself to practise law, followed another large body of young men in deciding to abandon it.

*A Literary Politician.*

Law is a branch of political science, and . . . we need to insist in very plain terms upon its study as such.

*Address before the American Bar Association,  
August 23, 1894.*

In gaining new functions, in being drawn into modern business instead of standing outside of it, in becoming identified with particular interests instead of holding aloof and impartially advising all interests, the lawyer has lost his old function, is looked askance at in politics . . .

*Address before the American Bar Association,  
August 31, 1910.*

#### I. WILSON SEEKS HIS FORTUNE

BY THE spring of 1882, Wilson felt himself well enough prepared in the law, and his health sufficiently restored, to make the grand venture into the world of affairs. He was twenty-five years old. High-keyed, sensitive, imaginative, he had for years led the more or less secluded, intense, indeed, passionate life of the scholar. He had made his father's darkened church ring with the orations of Demosthenes, he had walked with Shelley in a wood, but, so far as there is any record, he had never up to that time earned a dollar. He had won a prize or two, and he had received a small "honorarium" for his famous

article in the *International Review*, which he had immediately invested in a bookcase.<sup>1</sup> He knew as little as any man could, by actual experience, of the hurly-burly world. Yet, in the secret soul of him, no youth ever entertained ambitions more towering, or purposes more definite, for the leadership, indeed the reconstruction, of this very world with all its blunder-headed follies and stupidities, its sheer madness. "When I meet you in the Senate!"

There had naturally been a vast pother in the Wilson family as to the best location for the fledgling. They believed as firmly as he did in his future; but they knew something more of the bitter world. He must find a place that would serve his immediate necessities for making a living at his profession and at the same time open a way to political preferment. They finally settled upon Atlanta. It was the only city of the Old South which was recovering strongly from the exhaustion of the war and it seemed destined to become a great centre of commerce and industry. A town of thirty-seven thousand people, a quarter of whom were Negro, it had already become a thriving railroad centre. Among its leaders were some of the ablest progressives in the South, the most notable of whom was Henry W. Grady, of the *Atlanta Constitution*, whose statue now stands at the heart of a stirring city of two hundred thousand.

"After innumerable hesitations as to a place of settlement, I have at length fixed upon Atlanta, Ga. It, more than almost every other Southern City, offers all the advantages of business activity and enterprise. Its growth has during late years been wonderful. . . . And then, too, there seem to me to be many strong reasons for my remaining in the South. I am familiar with Southern life and manners, for one thing—and of course a man's mind

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<sup>1</sup>This bookcase he treasured all his life. It followed him to the White House, and afterward to the home of his retirement in S Street.

may be expected to grow most freely in its native air. Besides there is much gained in growing up with the section of country in which one's home is situate, and the South has really just begun to grow industrially. After standing still, under slavery, for half a century, she is now becoming roused to a new work and waking to a new life. There appear to be no limits to the possibilities of her development; and I think that to grow up with a new section is no small advantage to one who seeks to gain position and influence."<sup>1</sup>

The Wilsons were quite right in their opinion of the prospects of the city, but it was unfortunate for the youth that so many other young Southerners were coming to the same sagacious conclusion at the same time. The city directory for the year 1883, the only one in which Woodrow Wilson's name appears, gives a list of no fewer than one hundred and forty-three lawyers. Every two hundred and seventy of the population, including women, children, and Negroes, thus had a legal advocate and protector! But young Wilson knew nothing of these conditions.

He arrived in Atlanta about June 1st and immediately sought out a friend he had known slightly at the University of Virginia, Edward Ireland Renick. Renick was of old Virginia stock and his father, like Wilson's, was a minister. He had been graduated at Roanoke College and taken his degree at law in the University of Virginia in 1881, and had now come to Atlanta, as poor as poverty, but as free, to make his everlasting fortune. He and Wilson fell in love at once. They were of kindred minds, both highly gifted, and both intensely interested in books. Renick had a charm of manner combined with a grace of initial approach which contrasted with Wilson's incurable shyness.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Charles Talcott, September 22, 1881.



"A lovelier being never lived," Wilson said of him long afterward.<sup>1</sup>

They decided at once to form a partnership and together storm the fortress of undying fame, and since Renick was a little older than Wilson, the firm became Renick & Wilson. They took an office on the second floor, back, at

E. I. RENICK.

WOODROW WILSON.

## RENICK & WILSON,

ATTORNEYS AT LAW,

ATLANTA,

48 Marietta Street,  
Room 10.

GA.

Business card used by Renick and Wilson in 1882

48 Marietta Street, quite near the centre of everything, where clients could easily reach them from either one of two streets.<sup>2</sup> They put their little sign out at the window, and a few days later, in response to enthusiastic letters from Atlanta, the anxious folk back in Wilmington sent on the slim furnishings for the office—the desk, the book-case, the elocution chart. Wilson's mother sewed him some new shirts and wrote in her beautiful fine hand to inquire if they were a good fit. She filled her letter with anxious love:

"I cannot tell how glad I am that you continue to find your surroundings so pleasant. I think the one thing I am *most* glad of, is, that you have found Mr. Renick to be

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Thornton Whaling to the author.

<sup>2</sup>The building is still standing.

just what he is—It is far more than I had any hope of—  
He must be a sure ‘fellow’—and I am so thankful—

“I write in haste, dear—We love you so dearly—and  
miss you so terribly—God bless you, darling boy. . . .

“Papa & Josie join in fondest love to you

“Most lovingly

“Your

“MOTHER”<sup>1</sup>

It was not enough for the two friends that they were partners: they must also live together. Renick was making his home with Mrs. J. Reid Boylston,<sup>2</sup> a widow, of a fine old South Carolina family, at 344 Peach Tree Street, then in the principal residence district of the city. It was a comfortable, even spacious house with grounds and trees, and there were only two or three other boarders. Wilson was promptly introduced and taken in. On the first Sunday he was there he put on his best Princeton clothes and went to the First Presbyterian Church, which he continued to attend during his residence in Atlanta. A fine-appearing, dignified young man indeed. A future President of the United States!

Business did not at once pour in at 48 Marietta Street. Never mind: it is what one must expect. Young Wilson indeed had not yet been admitted to the bar, would not be until the sitting of the court in October. But there was plenty to do. In June, he went back to Princeton to the reunion of his much loved class, and he attended the General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church and sat on the platform to help his father, a task he performed for many years. He became great friends with Mrs. Boylston’s charming niece, Miss Katie Mayrant,

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<sup>1</sup>June 13, 1882.

<sup>2</sup>On the occasion of Mrs. Boylston’s eightieth birthday, when he was President of the United States, Wilson remembered her with a box of roses.

whom he instructed in stenography. They also read aloud together.<sup>1</sup> More important still, he spent the spacious days when everything was yet in a roseate haze of hope, in grand walks and talks with that "lovely being,"<sup>2</sup> Renick. They read together, the greatest books in the world.

"You and I sat nearly twenty years ago reading together the Eneid, and to-day we are as fresh and warm in our regard and affection—each for the other—as in those days of enthusiasm and romance.

"This I count among my dearest possessions—your genuine and *abiding* friendship."<sup>2</sup>

The two had many ideas and interests in common. How to lead the South out of the wilderness, how to reconstruct the Federal government so that it could be made truly responsible to the people, how to fight the tariff-grabbing special interests of the North—these were subjects to be ardently discussed by young statesmen who expected in time to "meet on the floor of the Senate."

Wilson kept up his steady reading of history and politics. He took to filling the bookcase he had bought at Princeton. He liked his own books, not books borrowed from libraries, and not many of them, but books that he could make his own by marginal noting. He liked to write his name in every one of them, and always the date of acquirement, and sometimes the dates of his reading. The first book he himself purchased was a copy of John Milton's poems. He already had quite a collection mostly presented to him by his father—and the precious volumes of Shelley and Keats. The Keats bears the inscription, "Wood. Wilson 1882" and the sonnet, "Nymph of the downward smile and sidelong glance," is marked in his hand. He had also, of course, his editions of Burke, Bagehot, Hallam, and Sir Henry Maine. Among others he ac-

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs. Kate Mayrant Simons to the author.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from E. I. Renick to Woodrow Wilson, December 29, 1899.

quired out of his meagre means, mostly during the Atlanta period, were these:

*English Poets*, in four volumes, edited by T. Humphry Ward.  
*Parliamentary Government in the British Colonies*, by Alphus Todd.

*Words and Their Uses*, by Richard Grant White.

## II. HE APPEARS BEFORE A CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE

Wilson began soon to get glimpses of the actual processes of the law in a city like Atlanta—the largest he had ever lived in. He attended the local courts, and the scales began to fall from his eyes. He found two highly educated and aristocratic young lawyers pouring forth floods of oratory over the case of a coloured man caught stealing a hen. He found a stew of pettifogging squabbles that seemed to him beneath the dignity of the court even to consider. He began to see how hard it was for starveling young lawyers to find even such “cases” as these. For the best of them, it was no bed of roses; for the younger and poorer, what was there but starvation or a skulduggery of practice utterly repugnant to a high-minded man. Wilson’s dislike and distrust of one of the most powerful of Georgia politicians of later years, which he never overcame or concealed, dated back to the experiences of those early days.

In late September, he had an eye-opening of another kind. The Tariff Commission was then going about the country taking evidence. It was scheduled to hold a meeting in the Kimball House, Atlanta, September 22d. Wilson and his friend Renick had surveyed its peregrinations from afar with disapproval; and dismissed its activities as the poorly concealed efforts of the protected interests of the North to fortify their privileges. Wilson, indeed, was not aware that the Commission was to come to Atlanta at all until there “came into our office a friend of



Renick's, Walter Page of the *N. Y. World*."<sup>1</sup> So met in the dingy little office, upstairs back, two ardent young Southerners, one of whom was to be President of the United States and to appoint the other Ambassador to the Court of St. James. But all that was æons of time away. And they did not know.

It was an altogether delightful meeting. They found themselves interested in the same things, with much the same point of view. Page was from the new Johns Hopkins, and could talk the language of the mind. They were both likewise men of the New South, impatient with old slogans and outworn hatreds. They were both Democrats looking with critical eyes at the "nonentity with side-whiskers" sitting in the White House at Washington, and both were opposed, root and branch, to the protective tariff system. Page "had been travelling about with the commissioners utterly destroying their reputation and overthrowing their adventitious dignity by his smart ridicule."<sup>2</sup> In no time at all Wilson had set forth his views. "... Page had discovered my deep interest in and considerable acquaintance with the issues involved and had persuaded me to address the commission the next morning. . . ."<sup>3</sup> The trouble had been all along, these young men agreed, that no one had set forth any general principles whatsoever; none of the larger national and international questions involved. Every witness who had a little manufacturing interest, no matter how small, wanted a protective tariff to guard his privilege: the public was unrepresented.

It required some assurance for this brief-less, fee-less, unknown young lawyer not yet admitted to the bar, to appear, along with the mayor of the city, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, and other dignitaries, as an

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<sup>1</sup>Woodrow Wilson to R. Heath Dabney, January 11, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

authority upon the problem that was vexing the nation—but it was not without the inner warrant of sound knowledge and complete conviction. When all is said, there was probably not a man in all Georgia, if in the South, better informed upon the historical and theoretical aspects of the tariff problem than he. Had he not studied the lives and times of Cobden and Bright and countered the arguments of John Stuart Mill? Had he not followed the debates in the American House of Representatives? He knew exactly where he stood and what he believed. He was for the popular interest, the Southern and Western agricultural interest, taxed without its knowledge, against the industrial and Eastern interest, beneficiaries of what he considered a government “bounty.”

“So it was that I hastily prepared a brief and undertook to make a few extemporaneous remarks before this much ridiculed body of incompetencies, influenced by the consideration that my speech would appear in their printed report, rather than by any hope of affecting their conclusions. I found it hard enough work, I can assure you, for the circumstances were most embarrassing. Six commissioners sat around a long table in the breakfast room of the Kimball House and about and behind them sat a few local dignitaries and four or five young men of my acquaintance, besides the reporters usually attendant upon the sittings. Embarrassed by the smallness and the character of the audience, but more especially by the ill-natured and sneering interruptions of the commissioners, I spoke without sufficient self-possession and certainly without much satisfaction to myself; but was compensated for my discomfort by the subsequent compliments of my friends and of the press—especially by the kind words of our Congressman from this district, in whose ability I have great confidence, and who was good enough to say

that my speech showed that I both knew what to say and how to say it.”<sup>1</sup>

The address he made is all of record and can now be read.<sup>2</sup> He quoted Gladstone and referred to John Stuart Mill, set forth all the current arguments with not a little of the power of eloquence, made one embarrassing mistake, but left no doubt whatever as to the clarity of his own views:

“ . . . I maintain that manufacturers are made better manufacturers whenever they are thrown upon their own resources and left to the natural competition of trade rather than when they are told, ‘You shall be held in the lap of the government, and you need not stand upon your feet.’ Such theories discourage skill, because it puts all industries upon an artificial basis.”

Just as he closed, Commissioner Garland asked him:

“Are you advocating the repeal of all tariff laws?”

He answered: “Of all protective tariff laws; of establishing a tariff for revenue merely.”

One exchange of view between the commission and their witness about which Wilson often told with delight in later years did not get into the final record. In illustrating one of his points he remarked that import charges on important books, like the works of Herbert Spencer, were unjust to American scholars.

“Do I understand, Mr. Wilson,” asked one of the committee, “that you advocate the circulation of *infidel* books among the people?”<sup>3</sup>

In his letter to Dabney recounting this stirring event, he speaks of the attendance at the hearing of “four or five young men of my acquaintance.” One of these friends

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<sup>1</sup>Woodrow Wilson to R. Heath Dabney, January 11, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 89-94.

<sup>3</sup>Professor Stockton Axson to the author.

carried away a vivid impression of "a man in dead earnest, who was extremely well-equipped with the facts."<sup>1</sup> Wilson had already begun to get around him, as he had done at college and at the university, a group of men interested in the larger questions of the day, men he could lead. That very night, while the interest in the tariff hearing was still hot, and Page was still there, he called them together in the office of Renick and Wilson; and on January 11, 1883, he organized a branch of the Free Trade Club of New York. It soon became, however, like similar clubs in which he had been interested, a place for general debate, a "Georgia House of Commons,"<sup>2</sup> and met every two weeks during the winter. Even after Wilson left Atlanta, it continued to exist under Renick's leadership, and Wilson wrote "appropriate communications of encouragement and instruction (!)."<sup>3</sup> One of the members of the club recalls that "almost all the talking was done by Wilson, and the subjects he seemed to be interested in chiefly were political, especially the tariff question."<sup>4</sup>

### III. ADMITTED TO THE BAR

In October, we have a glimpse of "a tall, dignified, bespectacled young man with blond hair" appearing in court before Judge George Hillyer to take his examination for admission to the bar.<sup>5</sup> The examinations in those days were conducted by a committee of four seasoned lawyers and had something of the interest of a gladiatorial contest. An audience was often present to watch the baiting of the would-be lawyer, and, there being too many lawyers anyway, court and bar were not too sorry when an applicant

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Peeples, now a leading lawyer of Atlanta.

<sup>2</sup>Woodrow Wilson to R. Heath Dabney, January 11, 1883.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, December 11, 1883.

<sup>4</sup>Mr. Peeples to the author.

<sup>5</sup>Judge Hillyer is still living at the age of ninety-one, a sturdy, gray-headed old man, who remembers the circumstances well.



failed. Wilson's examination lasted all of two hours, and was the more severe because of the publicity which had attended the applicant's astonishing temerity in appearing before the Tariff Commission. His responses were, however, "not short of brilliant," and when the examiner finally propounded a long and complicated catch question, the Judge interposed:

"Mr. Wilson needn't respond to that question. The Court himself could not answer it."

A great many years later, when this young lawyer was swiftly becoming one of the foremost men in the country, he went to Atlanta to address the Southern Commercial Congress. At a breakfast given in his honour, he was introduced by Judge Hillyer. Ex-President Roosevelt had addressed a meeting on the previous day, and President Taft was to speak that evening. Judge Hillyer, in presenting Mr. Wilson, said:

"Last night we had here a man who has been President of the United States. This evening we shall hear a man who is President of the United States. But we have with us this morning a man who is going to be President of the United States."<sup>1</sup>

In his speech on that occasion Mr. Wilson started off by paying a tribute to Judge Hillyer, and telling how he had been examined for admission to the bar.

Wilson's certificate of admission to practice in the state courts of Georgia is dated October 19, 1882. In the following March, the 12th, he qualified for the Federal courts—though he had not enough money on hand at the time to pay the ten-dollar fee, and the application bears the notation, "owes \$5.00."

If the legal business of his firm continued lean, Wilson was to have still another impressive experience. He had

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<sup>1</sup>At a breakfast tendered to Mr. Wilson by the Young Men's Democratic League in Atlanta, March 10, 1911.

seen something of court practice, he had taken a part in a national Congressional investigation. He was now to make an acquaintance with a *post-bellum* Southern legislature. Having time enough and to spare, he sat in the gallery of the Georgia Senate, looking down upon the assembled legislators—country lawyers, merchants, farmers, politicians, all of them poor, many densely ignorant. Above all, untrained! As different as the poles from the British Parliament, wherein a class of men from leisured families, disciplined for leadership, ruled the state. The whole subject of parliamentary government, the principles of democratic control, had been beyond any others the centre of his interest. He had thought of himself as a leader upon the floor of just such assemblies, mind meeting mind in splendid tourney, with the decision falling to him whose intellectual sword flashed keenest. For years, in imagination, he had been rising in the Commons with Pitt and Brougham; he had made the woods near Monticello ring with the stirring periods of Bright and Gladstone; he had stood in the Senate with Webster and Calhoun and Clay and even—such were the soaring wings of the youth—he had spoken with Demosthenes to the elect of Athens. And here before him was the crude and stumbling reality.

The very first thing he found the legislators doing aroused in him the strongest indignation. They had been asked to raise more money for the miserably supported schools of their state, they had been told by their state superintendent of education, Dr. Orr, that the taxpayers could easily bear the burden of added appropriations, but they voted down the proposal by a large majority and passed a resolution on the spot "that the Representatives and Senators of the State in Washington be requested to do all in their power to secure a grant from the federal treasury in aid of education."

This offended all his instincts. It was another case, like that of the tariff, of running to the Federal government for bounties and privileges, when the people should stand up like men and fight their own fights and pay their own bills. He wrote indignantly to his friend Robert Bridges:

"I heard but one speech made in opposition to this begging resolution. It was a sturdy appeal to the self-respect and independence of the majority in view of what the speaker treated as the unquestioned ability of the State to support a school system of any dimensions. No one seemed to regard it worth while answering this speech—and the resolution was carried. The whole proceeding impressed me as a shameless declaration of the determination on the part of a well-to-do community, to enjoy the easy position of a beneficiary of the national govt. to the fullest possible extent."<sup>1</sup>

To this ardent, gifted, high-spirited youth, with his noble ideals of public service, all these contacts with the starved and barren life of the *post-bellum* South were utterly disillusioning. To go through such a law practice to take part in such politics! Possibly, if clients had come knocking at his door with interesting cases to engage his restless mind, his history might have been different, but so far as the present biographer is able to discover, Wilson, the lawyer, never had a case of his own—although he was assigned in court, upon one occasion, to represent a Negro who had no lawyer. His principal client was his mother, who sent him<sup>2</sup> a power of attorney for the control of her own small property, which had been in the hands of his uncle, James Bones. But his effort to serve that one client—which involved a visit to his uncle at Rome, Georgia, in April, 1883—was to result in one of the most important events of his entire life.

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<sup>1</sup>February 27, 1886—in recounting afterward his memory of the event.

<sup>2</sup>Letter of June 13, 1882.

## IV. DISCOURAGEMENT AND SELF-DISCOVERY

By the turn of the year we find Wilson becoming much discouraged. "... the potentially great firm of Renick and Wilson [is] doing *very* little, but hoping very *much*. . . . In the course of about one year we hope to be meeting expenses after some sort; but at present we are not doing so, not by a very large majority."<sup>1</sup>

He was acutely conscious of the burden he was upon his father, and of the uncomplaining sacrifices of his mother. His father, indeed, was beginning to wonder why nothing was happening. "That boy down in Atlanta isn't making a cent," he told a friend in Wilmington.

"... I am still following the young lawyer's occupation of *waiting*. One or two minute fees I have earned—nothing more—though I have had business enough of a certain kind, the collection—or the effort to collect—numberless desperate claims."<sup>2</sup>

Worse still, Wilson was finding the law itself more and more intolerable.

"I fully sympathize with the Hen. in his impatience of the dreadful drudgery which attends the initiation into our profession. But a stout heart will pull us both through right bravely, I hope. I keep myself in good humour, besides, by indulging in my favourite recreation, composition. I allow myself my afternoons for writing—and for reading on my old and loved topics, history and political science; devouring Houghton, Mifflin, and Co's *American Statesmen* series, and Macmillans' *English Citizen* series—both altogether to my taste. Possibly, if I can find on the continent some specially kind and specially venturesome publisher, what I write may some day see the light, and

<sup>1</sup>Woodrow Wilson to R. Heath Dabney, January 11, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>Woodrow Wilson to Robert Bridges, January 4, 1883.



masquerade in print. But I am no longer confident of finding such a publisher.”<sup>1</sup>

He was trying his hand at articles for the *New York Evening Post*, with which his friend Bridges was connected—one a “short piece on convict labour”—for which a little money came in, but his real interest as a writer was in the development of his own ideas regarding American congressional government, which no one seemed to want. He wrote a number of chapters, sending them on to the *Nation*, through the good offices of Bridges, only to have them come back with “Mr. Garrison’s extremely unfavourable opinion.” He was apparently failing at everything he tried.

While the youth thus waits for clients, he is eating his heart out for the “advantages and delights of study,” and grows pathetically envious of his friend Dabney, who has gone to Germany to work for his doctor’s degree. The very “name of his courses” is music in his ears. Few there are, but they are of the elect of the earth, who know the hunger of the scholarly mind for food that will truly satisfy its appetite. He writes to Dabney:

“The receipt of your letter rejoiced my heart. You great fat Dutchman, you! The idea of your weighing one hundred and sixty-three pounds! How I would like to see you and your beer-wetted paunch! I should like to be with you for more reasons than one, indeed—not only to renew the pleasures of our old university good-fellowship, but also to share your advantages and delights of study. History and Political Science! why they are of all studies my favourites; and to be allowed to fill all my time with them, instead of, as now, stealing only a chance opportunity or two for hasty perusal of those things which are most delightful to me, would be of all privileges the most valued by yours humbly. I have to be content

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Robert Bridges, October 28, 1882.

with a very precarious allowance of such good things. . . .

"However that may be, I am, at all events, very much interested in even the name of your courses and am impelled to beg that you will give me some particular account of them; that you will tell me just what line the German students pursue—especially in Political Science. To know what they think the best methods of study would be of much advantage to me. I should like, as far as possible, to go along with you in your work."<sup>1</sup>

All that spring of 1883 he grows more and more hopeless. He longs for the beautiful things of the mind. He suffers acutely from the "lack of intellectual companionship." The practice of the law is not what he thought. Its "practice . . . for purposes of gain, is antagonistic to the best interests of the intellectual life." He turns again to the study of his own beloved subjects. He discovers to his relief that some of the very men of his admiration, Burke, Sir Henry Maine, and Bagehot "trained as lawyers but found the legal profession unsatisfying." And he makes the decision finally to abandon Atlanta and "follow the natural bent" of his mind, by pursuing his studies at Johns Hopkins University.

In a letter to Dabney, remarkable for the disclosure of the restless and aspiring soul of the man, he sets forth the reasons why he is abandoning the law, exhibits his interest in local state politics, and engages his friend in a discussion of a definition of "the State."

48 Marietta Street,  
Atlanta, Geo., May 11th 1883

MY DEAR HEATH,

The receipt of your letter was a delightful surprise. I say "surprise" because it cannot but be a matter of grateful surprise that anyone—even you—away off there in Europe, sur-

<sup>1</sup>January 11, 1883.

rounded by everything that is attractive in the old world, deep in the work of a great university, and looking forward to a Ph. D. in Berlin, should ever think of me, buried in humdrum life down here in slow, ignorant, uninteresting Georgia. I read this letter of yours with as much envy as I felt when I read the one which preceded it: for who can help envying a man who is taking, under the most favourable circumstances imaginable, the very course that one longs to take himself? It is not human nature to do otherwise. I am, however, (let me tell you with rejoicings) about to do what is the next best thing, for a fellow who is confined to the limits of this continent: for I have about made up my mind to study, at Johns Hopkins University, the very subjects which you are now studying in Germany under the great masters with unpronounceable names. In doing this I am, beyond all reasonable doubt, following the natural bent of my mind. I can never be happy unless I am enabled to lead an intellectual life. . . . But hereabouts culture is very little esteemed; not, indeed, at all because it is a drug on the market, but because there is so little of it that its good qualities are not appreciated. . . . It goes, therefore, without the saying that, though I am . . . being made wise in worldly craft, I suffer very much in such a community for lack of intellectual companionship.

But the greater matter is that the practice of the law, when conducted for purposes of gain, is antagonistic to the best interests of the intellectual life. One can easily exchange one community for another: he can even live above the deteriorating influences of the community in which his lot is cast; but he cannot so emancipate himself from the necessary conditions of his profession. The philosophical *study* of the law—which must be a pleasure to any thoughtful man—is a very different matter from its scheming and haggling practice. Burke spoke with his usual clear-sighted wisdom when he spoke of the law as “one of the first and noblest of human sciences—a science which does more to *quicken* and *invigorate* the understanding than all the other kinds of learning put together; but it is not apt, except in persons very happily born, to *open* and to *liberalize* the mind in exactly the same proportion.” . . .

Now, here it is that the whole secret of my new departure lies. You know my passion for original work, you know my

love for composition, my keen desire to become a master of philosophical discourse, to become capable and apt in instructing as great a number of persons as possible. My plain necessity, then, is some profession which will afford me a moderate support, favourable conditions for study, and considerable leisure; what better can I be, therefore, than a professor, a lecturer upon subjects whose study most delights me? Therefore it is that I have prayed to be made a fellow of Johns Hopkins; and therefore it is that I am determined, if I fail of that appointment (as I probably shall, since it is not won but given) to go next winter anyhow to Baltimore to attend the University lectures and bury myself for a season in the grand libraries of that beautiful city. . . .

Governor McDaniel was inaugurated yesterday. As I sat here at my desk I could see from my office windows, which look out upon the principal entrance of the big, ugly building which serves new Atlanta as a temporary capitol, the mixed crowds going in to secure seats in the galleries of the House of Representatives at the inauguration ceremonies. They were probably not much entertained, though they may have been considerably diverted, for our new governor cannot talk. He stutters most painfully, making quite astonishing struggles for utterance. A Tennessean wag expressed great commiseration for Georgia in her poverty of sound candidate material, and offered to send some over from Tenn. for the relief of a State which was about to replace a governor who could not walk<sup>1</sup> with a governor who could not talk. McDaniel is sound enough in other respects, however—not remarkable except for honesty—always remarkable in a latter-day politician—but steady and sensible, all the harder worker, perhaps, because he can't talk.

If my letter were not already too long, I should like to discuss with you Riehl's provisional definition of the State. The definition given somewhere by Woolsey is: "A community of persons living within certain limits of territory, under a permanent organization, which aims to secure the prevalence of justice by self-imposed laws." It is noticeable that the American founds his idea of the State on the authority of the people, conceiving of laws as of course self-imposed, whilst the German

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander H. Stephens.



does not put the origin of the laws upon the face of his definition. Woolsey's seems to me better in *form*. It is more accurate, at least, to speak of the State as a community of persons living under a common system of laws than as a "popular community founded upon a common system of laws." Woolsey leaves out of his definition, however, the idea of defence against external foes, which Riehl includes—But more of this another time.

Try to write soon again. Your letters afford me the sincerest delight and the greatest entertainment. If you want an appreciative reader, you can't do better than to write to me.

With much love,

Your sincere friend,

WOODROW WILSON.

His experience in Atlanta was at least one of self-discovery. And he was then, and always afterward, a swift learner. A man "must know the times into which he has been born: and this I did *not* know when I left college and chose my profession. . . ."<sup>1</sup> He sees the change that has come about with the passage of the frontier life and by reason of the war:

"It is plain to see why lawyers used to be the only politicians. In a new country, in communities where every man had his bread to earn, they were the only men (except the minister and the physician) who stopped amidst the general hurry of life to get learning; and they were the only men, without exception, who were skilled in those arts of forensic contest that were calculated to fit men for entering the lists at political tilts, or for holding their own in legislative debate. They could hope too, when a turn of parties might have come, or their own popularity might have waned, to return to their places at the bar to find a place still open for them, to find themselves not altogether and hopelessly crowded out; they could even, like Webster and Jeremiah Mason and many others of less

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, October 30, 1883.

genius, make law and statecraft live and thrive together, pleading causes in the courts even while holding seats in the Senate or leading parties in the House.

"But those times are passing away. A man who has to earn a livelihood cannot nowadays turn aside from his trade for intervals of office-holding and political activity. He cannot even do two things at once. He is constrained by a minute division of labour to bend all his energies to the one thing that is nearest at hand. Even in the law men are becoming specialists. . . . Whoever thinks, as I thought, that he can practise law successfully and study history and politics at the same time is woefully mistaken. If he is to make a living at the bar he must be a lawyer *and nothing else*. Of course he can compass a certain sort of double-calling success by dint of dishonesty. He can obtain, and betray, clients by pretending a knowledge of the law which he does not possess; and he can often gain political office by the arts of the demagogue. But he cannot be both a learned lawyer and a profound and public-spirited statesman, if he must plunge into practice and make the law a means of support."<sup>1</sup>

"Profound and public-spirited statesmanship," in spite of the disillusionment, is still his highest ambition—but he must reach his end by some other road.

In April, 1883, he saw Ellen Axson for the first time. With some great men, love and marriage are incidental and can be brushed aside with a mere chronicle of the dates; with Woodrow Wilson, they were central to his life. His career cannot be understood without a knowledge of them. He had "come to himself" in a religious sense in Columbia at sixteen, intellectually at Princeton at nineteen, and now he was to know one of the deepest, if not the deepest, awakenings of his entire life.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, October 30, 1883.

## CHAPTER VII

### ELLEN AXSON

No one is so sensitive, as a rule, as the student—and there's no cure for sensitiveness like a wife's sympathy,—no strength like that to be gotten from her love and trust.

*Letter of Woodrow Wilson, May 31, 1888.*

... such a mind as we most desire to see in a woman,—a mind that stirs without irritating you, that rouses but does not belabour, amuses and yet subtly instructs.

*A Literary Politician.*

He would have been wise, perhaps, without her; but he would not have been wise so delightfully.

*A Literary Politician.*

IT WAS in the month of April—the most enchanting of all the year in Georgia—that the junior member of the “potentially great” but poverty-stricken firm of Renick & Wilson, attorneys at law of Atlanta, set off for a visit to Rome. A tall, well-groomed young man, “with a silky moustache and short side-whiskers,” he carried himself with a dignity of assurance certainly not warranted by the eminence of his position in the legal world of Georgia. In his bag he had a slim packet of papers, including a power of attorney, dealing with the affairs of his only important client—his mother. He was going up to confer with his uncle, James Bones, who had until recently managed her affairs. He took with him his typewriter—a calligraph—that he might draw up any necessary papers, or copy out further paragraphs from his stenographic notes of an essay which he was then preparing

upon his favourite theme of cabinet government as it might be adapted to the American system.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt the trip also promised a pleasant diversion from the cares of 48 Marietta Street, for he would find himself among some of his relatives and oldest friends. As a boy, he had spent much time in the home of his aunt, Marion Woodrow Bones, and his cousin Jessie, now married to A. T. H. Brower, had been his playmate. The journey itself through the rolling green hills of Northern Georgia, with the apple trees in blossom, must have been a rare delight: and the fine old town with its broad central street or market, and its great trees and stately old houses, a charming relief from the vexed life of Atlanta.

His fame had preceded him—well published by his enthusiastic cousins and the uncle who had crept into the back of the crowded room at the University of Virginia to hear the famous oration on John Bright. No doubt the number of the *International Review* containing his article on "Cabinet Government in the United States" was not too deeply buried upon the library table of that reading family. There had also been recent reports of his appearance before the Tariff Commission at Atlanta; and, finally, who would not turn to look at the son of so famous a preacher as Dr. Wilson, the nephew of so noted a scholar as Professor James Woodrow! Family meant much in the South in those days.

He visited the Bones family, who lived in East Rome, and called upon the Browsers. Not far away dwelt the Tedcastles, also newly married, Mrs. Tedcastle having been Agnes Vaughn. Agnes Tedcastle and Jessie Brower numbered among their most intimate friends one of the "rarest and most beautiful girls that ever lived in Rome"

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<sup>1</sup>An article published the following January (1884) in the *Overland Monthly* and called "Committee or Cabinet Government?" *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 95-129.





ELLEN AXSON  
IN 1883, WHEN WOODROW WILSON FIRST MET HER



—Ellen Louise Axson. She was the daughter of the Manse. Her father was the minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Rome; her grandfather, the "great Axson," was pastor of the famous Independent Presbyterian Church of Savannah.

Ellen Axson was not only the daughter of the Manse, but its mistress as well, for her mother had died two years previously and left a family of four children, of whom Ellen was the oldest.<sup>1</sup> At twenty-three she was thus the head of a considerable household. A cousin who knew her well thus describes her:

"She always had a flower-like appearance; her hair was a bronze gold, her eyes were a deep brown, and her face was all aglow with the marvellous colour that she never lost."<sup>2</sup>

It was Ellen Axson who first saw Woodrow Wilson. She and Agnes Tedcastle were standing on the porch of the Tedcastle home. A young man was passing in the street below.

"Who is that fine-looking man?" asked Ellen Axson.

"I don't know whether to tell you or not, you man-hater," replied her friend. "That is Tommy Wilson."<sup>3</sup>

The young man passing in the street was wholly unaware that he was being observed; he was unaware of Ellen Axson, though he had heard of her as the daughter of a friend of his father. Indeed, he himself once related that, during a visit in his childhood, when he was a child of some six or seven years, and she not more than two, he had insisted upon holding her in his arms.

It was not until the following day, which was Sunday, that he saw her. The Bones family went to the Presby-

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen Axson was born May 15, 1860, in Savannah. The other children were Stockton, born 1867, Edward, 1876, and Margaret (now Mrs. Edward Elliott), 1881.

<sup>2</sup>Miss Mary W. Hoyt to the author.

<sup>3</sup>Mrs. A. W. Tedcastle to the author. Also account in letters written by Ellen Axson.

terian Church, in which James Bones was an elder. We have Wilson's own account of that great experience:

"The first time I saw your face to note it was in church one morning during the first of my last spring's visits to Rome—in April, wasn't it? You wore a heavy crêpe veil, and I remember thinking 'what a bright, pretty face; what splendid, mischievous, laughing eyes! I'll lay a wager that this demure little lady has lots of life and fun in her!' And when, after the service (I think it had been a communion service) you spoke to Mrs. Bones, I took another good look at you, and concluded that it would be a very clever plan to inquire your name and seek an introduction. When I learned that this was Miss 'Ellie Lou' Axson, of whom I had heard so often, quite a flood of light was let in on my understanding and I was conscious of having formed a small resolution. I took an early opportunity of calling on the Rev. Mr. Axson. That dear gentleman received me with unsuspecting cordiality and sat down to entertain me under the impression that I had come to see only him. I *had* gone to see him, for I love and respect him and would have gone to see him with alacrity if he had never had a daughter; but I had not gone to see him *alone*. I had not forgotten that face, and I wanted very much to see it again: so I asked rather pointedly after his daughter's health, and he, in some apparent surprise, summoned you to the parlour. Do you remember?—and do you remember the topic of conversation? how your father made me 'tackle' that question that was so much too big for me, 'Why have night congregations grown so small?'"<sup>1</sup>

It was a fast and furious courtship; there were long walks and longer talks, and boat rides and picnics. The youth "could not keep away"; he "had to call every afternoon." We have the first three little notes that Ellen

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, October 11, 1883.



Axson ever wrote him, preserved through the years, the first two on stiff black-bordered cards (for she was still in mourning for her mother) and primly addressed "Mr. Wilson," and the third on plain paper with the more intimate "Mr. Woodrow."

MR. WILSON,

I am sincerely sorry that a previous engagement will deprive me of the pleasure of your company tonight. I would have been glad of the opportunity to welcome you back to Rome.

Sincerely your friend,

Thursday.

ELLEN AXSON

MR. WILSON,

I have no engagement for this afternoon, and it will afford me pleasure to take the drive. I will be ready at the appointed hour.

Very sincerely,

Monday.

ELLEN AXSON

MR. WOODROW,

Very unwillingly, and with the firm conviction that I am the most unfortunate of mortals, I write to tell Jessie with my best thanks, that I won't be able to go on this picnic either.—I last evening made an ill-timed engagement to take a boat-ride on that afternoon, and like Sterne's starling "I can't get out" of it.—Excuse my keeping Lefoy so long, but all this time I have been trying in vain, to devise ways and means of escape.

There is no reason nor even—strange to say—*disinclination*, to prevent my saying most truthfully that I will be happy to walk with you this afternoon. With love to Jessie, I remain

Your sincere friend

Monday morning.

ELLEN L. AXSON.

She was a girl of interests and aspirations not less high and fine than those of Woodrow Wilson. She had grown up in "a home of books and religion." She was then, and

all her life afterward, a wide reader; her mind was alive with the best thought of the world. She had broader interests than the young lawyer of Atlanta with his intense, passionate, consuming devotion to his political studies. She opened to him at once the world that Wordsworth knew, and Sidney Lanier and Robert Browning and Laurence Sterne. She opened to him also the world of art, of which he knew nothing, for she had not only an interest in painting, but a real gift which she was to cultivate in an art school in New York and then sacrifice, as many another talented woman has done, to the career of her husband.

The friendship of Ellen Axson and Woodrow Wilson ripened swiftly. In September, 1883, on his way north to Baltimore, the young lawyer stopped at Asheville, North Carolina, and, walking up the street, saw by chance a girl sitting on the upper porch of the hotel. She was wearing a hat with a peculiar braid upon it which he knew at once. He sprang up the stairs to meet her. She had been summoned home by the serious illness of her father and was stopping to wait between trains. The youth carried everything before him. They walked up and down the porch, he quoted to her Bagehot's remark that a bachelor is "an amateur in life," and before they parted they were engaged.<sup>1</sup>

It was in many ways the most important experience of Woodrow Wilson's life. It was not until he met Ellen Axson, as he himself said, that he became "fully himself."<sup>2</sup> It discovered to him, at length, how he was to use his "unguided strength." It was a love "true and fit for foul weather."

"A man who lives only for himself has not begun to live—has yet to learn his use, and his real pleasure, too,

<sup>1</sup>September 16, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 16, 1884.

in the world. It is not necessary he should marry to find himself out, but it is necessary he should love.”<sup>1</sup>

It was an attachment such as the youth himself had never dreamed of, such a “new realization” as he could not have imagined. His conception of women had been founded partly no doubt upon Scott’s and Cooper’s novels and partly built upon the chivalrous Southern ideal. He had sought to “cherish that chivalrous, almost worshipful, regard for woman which seems to me the truest badge of nobility in man.”<sup>2</sup> He sits willingly now at her feet. A letter written a little more than a month after their engagement lets us deep into the heart of the man:

“I am proud and wilful beyond all measure . . . and I used to think, like other young men I suppose, that I should never pay any but entirely voluntary homage to any woman. With an absurd pride of intellect, like Lydgate’s, I thought it might be possible to get along with a wife as a leisure-moment companion, dispensing with intellectual sympathy. Not that I did not *want* such sympathy—I knew that there would be a dreary side to life without it—nor because I thought women as a rule incapable of giving it; but principally, I believe, because I thought it would be unreasonable to expect my wife to go with me, even in spirit, into all the so-esteemed dry paths into which my studies were naturally leading me. See, therefore, how valuable to me . . . was that conversation about the characters in *Middlemarch*, as we were returning once from ‘a certain walk up a hill.’ I had not read *Middlemarch* then, but I had the delight of hearing you expound the significance of its plot; and from that exposition I made a discovery that thrilled me: that you knew what sort of a wife *I* needed—though you were not applying the moral to my case, and did not know how directly the

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<sup>1</sup>*When a Man Comes to Himself*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, April 24, 1884.

story came home to my experience. I don't mean to compare myself with Lydgate. I have not yet proved myself possessed of any extraordinary talents; and I cannot claim the possession until I have put away certain discursive habits and brought all the powers I have into the line of some concentrated effort. But there is a very distinct parallel between Lydgate's aspirations and my own, and between the conditions—the conditions of home-life—necessary to my ultimate success and those which might have ensured his. No man who has a heart cast for the domestic relation, no man who isn't *merely* a student, simply a thinking machine, could wish to marry a woman such as John Stuart Mill married and doted on, who expels sentiment from life, knows as much as her husband of the matters of his special study, and furnishes him with opinions, ministering not to his love but to his logical faculty. . . . But, on the other hand, a man with any of the keen sensibilities of the student must be miserable if he have a study into which his wife cannot come as his close companion.”<sup>1</sup>

From the very first, Ellen Axson entered into every thought, every plan of Woodrow Wilson. She influenced his life at many of its critical moments. To an extraordinary extent, she protected him, guided him, established the environment in which his intense nature could best function. “I am the only one who can rest him,” she told a friend. She lacked somewhat of gaiety; she was perhaps over-earnest; but she understood him from the first. She held him back when he was willing impetuously to cut off his work at Johns Hopkins in order to marry her. She mitigated the intensity of his likes and dislikes; she was the wise counsellor at every turn of his life. “My salvation,” he once told her, “is in being loved. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, October 18, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, December 7, 1884.



He was a man of intense reserve, "never vouchsafing more than a glimpse of the thoughts and impulses and affections which are part and parcel of myself, and so sacred, not because they are great and rare, but because they are private, personal, not current upon the vulgar tongue of the world."<sup>1</sup> But to her he could open his whole soul:

"... you are the only person in the world—except the dear ones at home—with whom I do *not* have to act a part, to whom I do *not* have to deal out confidences cautiously; and you are the only person in the world—without *any* exception—to whom I can tell *all* that my heart contains."<sup>2</sup>

He was essentially a lonely man: and his dependence upon his wife grew with the years. He was never away from home more than a day without writing to her, writing often at great length, and not mere letters full of dusty cares, but love letters. And the first thing he did upon his return from a journey, no matter how short, was to sit down and give "Ellen" a full account of it. Beginning in 1883, their correspondence continued for thirty years—hundreds upon hundreds of letters—and to the end they were love letters. There seemed never to have been a failure upon the part of either to take the other, with absolute truthfulness, into full confidence.

Two years were to pass before their marriage, in 1885—two years of intense study for Woodrow Wilson, a year at her art in New York for Ellen Axson.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, August 31, 1884

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, December 18, 1884.

## CHAPTER VIII

### JOHNS HOPKINS

1883-1885

What I have wished to emphasize is the *object* for which I came to the University: to get a special training in historical research and an insight into the most modern literary and political thoughts and methods, in order that my ambition to become an invigorating and enlightening power in the world of political thought and a master in some of the less serious branches of literary art may be the more easy of accomplishment.

*Letter to Ellen Axson, October 30, 1883.*

The season of preparation has been long, and will yet last a little while; but there's still time, God willing, to do some good, honest, hard work in which the accumulated momentum of the time past may be made to tell.

*Letter to Ellen Axson, December 28, 1883.*

. . . I feel that I am representing men who have taken from this University an ideal which has lifted their lives to a plane they might not otherwise have attained; an ideal . . . of the service of truth not only, but of the service through truth, of the country of which they are citizens.

*Address at the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Johns Hopkins University, February 21, 1902.*

#### I. "THE BEST PLACE IN AMERICA TO STUDY"

IT WAS as though a great load had been lifted from his spirit when Wilson decided finally, in the spring of 1883, to give up his attempt to practise law and return to the "advantages and delights of study." "Let me tell you with rejoicings,"<sup>1</sup> he writes to his friend Dabney of his plans to go to Johns Hopkins. The year at Atlanta had been one of disillusionment. It had revealed to him the crude actualities of life in North Georgia as it was at that time.

<sup>1</sup>May 11, 1883.

"Here the chief end of man is certainly to make money, and money cannot be made except by the most vulgar methods. The studious man is pronounced impractical and is suspected as a visionary. All students of specialties—except such practical specialties as carpentering, for instance—are classed together as mere ornamental furniture in the intellectual world—curious, perhaps, and pretty enough, but of very little use and no mercantile value."<sup>1</sup>

No doubt his comments on North Georgia, the reaction of his own high-keyed, impatient, ambitious spirit, as yet wholly unadjusted, are too scathing, for he himself made friends there, and found in Renick and others "companions of the mind." If his roots had gone deeper into the life of Atlanta, even at that time, he would have found far more of the nourishment his spirit sought.

But the rough contact of the world, the real world, hard and bitter, was what he needed. He had been too softly nurtured. Buffeting and disillusionment were good for him. They gave him a clearer understanding of his own innate capacities and desires. He was not only high-spirited but hungry-minded.

It was a profound inner paradox which confronted him. At the same time that he suffered the not unfamiliar but none the less bitter tragedy of the sensitive, highly cultivated, philosophical nature in process of slow suffocation by "humdrum, ignorant and uninteresting surroundings," he was yet scourged by a veritable passion of aspiration, a fierce intensity of ambition, to teach and lead the mass of people whom he found it difficult to live among. His was the ancient dilemma of the prophetic spirit, either to surrender his vision, drift with his time, and presently become as drab as his mediocre environment, or else remake the stubborn world so that his vision might

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to R. Heath Dabney, May 11, 1883.

there find a safe lodgment, his spirit a friendly dwelling place. A weaker nature might have solved the problem by an escape to the false security of some distant New York or Paris that promised ready-made the atmosphere of cultivation which his soul craved without the toil necessary to create it. Many a choice spirit goes that way to perdition. But Wilson's difficulties seemed always to sharpen the lines in his chin, harden the purpose in his eye. He must and will have "the things of the mind," yet he must and will take his place among the people, play his part in the events of the rough world. He cannot indeed be happy without leading an intellectual life, and yet he feels powerfully within a "strong instinct of leadership"<sup>1</sup> which will not be denied. All his life he was to be torn asunder by these conflicting passions.

When he feels himself blocked in his first essay at his problem, through the practice of the law, he reforms his forces and attacks on a new front. He sees his own course with astonishing clarity. He writes to Ellen Axson, shortly after going to Johns Hopkins:

"In a word, my ambition could not be fulfilled at the bar; the studies for which I was best fitted, both by nature and by acquired habit, were not legitimate in a law office, and I was compelled in very justice to myself to seek some profession in which they would be legitimate. Evidently, however, there was small latitude of choice. A professorship was the only feasible place for me, the only place that would afford leisure for reading and for original work, the only strictly literary berth with an income attached. True, professorships were scarce and hard to get, and professors could not participate actively in public affairs; but even a professorship might be gotten as soon as a competence at the bar, and the occupancy of office had never been an essential part of my political pro-

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, February 24, 1885.



gramme. Indeed, I knew very well that a man without independent fortune must in any event content himself with becoming an *outside* force in politics, and I was well enough satisfied with the prospect of having whatever influence I might be able to exercise make itself felt through literary and non-partisan agencies. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

In short, if he could not reach his end directly by the beaten path of the law, the political organization, the State House, the Senate, he would do it by means of education and "literary and non-partisan agencies." His end was still the same: "profound and public-spirited statesmanship." With his instinct for seeking always the most distinguished opportunity within his horizon, he would have gone to Germany to study, joining his friend Dabney—his letters are full of longing for that paradise of scholarship—but he had no money, he had never mastered the German language, and besides all that he had looked into the eyes of the demure daughter of the Manse at Rome.

No doubt his meeting with Ellen Axson in April, 1883, and the swift development of their love affair confirmed his decision, but his letters show that his course was already clear in his mind. He was not, indeed, engaged to be married until September, and he had applied in May for a fellowship at Johns Hopkins, which was denied him. In July (the 26th) we find him, fellowship or no fellowship, writing to President Daniel Coit Gilman that he proposes "to attend the session of Johns Hopkins during the coming Winter, for the purpose of pursuing special studies in history and political science."

But Ellen Axson, if she was not the determining influence in his decision, was, nevertheless, a powerful stimulant in advancing his plans. She urged him always to "seek the highest things he felt in his soul." She confirmed him in his aspirations, cheered him in his struggle. Noth-

<sup>1</sup>October 30, 1883.

ing was to stand in the way of the supreme end, not even their marriage.

Such was the ardent, high-spirited, clear-seeing, intensely ambitious young man of twenty-seven who arrived in Baltimore on September 18, 1883. Only two days before, he had become engaged to Ellen Axson, writing exultantly to his family about it on the train that was taking him north.

His application for admission to Johns Hopkins gives further evidence, if any were necessary, of the clarity of his purpose. He knew exactly what he wanted and why:

"My purpose in coming to the university is to qualify myself for teaching the studies I wish to pursue, namely, history and political science, as well as to fit myself for those special studies of constitutional history upon which I have already bestowed some attention."<sup>1</sup>

His reply to the query as to what subjects he was prepared to be examined upon—"how far your studies have gone"—is also illuminating as to his intellectual preparation:

"I am prepared to be examined upon the constitutional machinery of the English Government (Bagehot's *English Constitution*), upon the general course of Colonial history, i. e., the history of the English Colonies in America (Lodge's *Short History*, Doyle's *Virginia, Md., and the Carolinas*, Scott's *Constitutional Development*), upon the phases of the free trade controversy and upon the general topics of political economy which I have studied in Professor Fawcett's writings and in the lectures of the late Professor Atwater of Princeton. My preparation is one of general reading rather than of special training."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Reply number 6 in Woodrow Wilson's application for a post-graduate course at Johns Hopkins.

<sup>2</sup>Reply number 7 in Woodrow Wilson's application for a post-graduate course at Johns Hopkins.

It is interesting, in the after-look, that one of the authorities he cites is that other brilliant young American, Henry Cabot Lodge, who was to play such a bitter part in Wilson's later career.

Johns Hopkins was then in the first flush of its splendid enthusiasm for scholarship. It had been organized only seven years before, and while its physical equipment was by no means equal to that of any one of several other American universities, it had an idea, a zest, that set its students on fire. And it had a group of great teachers, great men, as its guides and leaders. While frankly modelled upon those thorough German universities which were attracting so many of the finest young scholars of the world, it had a quality of intellectual daring, a youthful enthusiasm, that, as Wilson told his friend Dabney, made it "the best place in America to study."<sup>1</sup>

## II. THE POST-GRADUATE STUDENT

Much as Wilson had looked forward to the opportunity at Johns Hopkins, he was at first doubtful of the method, fearful of being "intellectually strait-jacketed." By this time he had had no inconsiderable direct experience with colleges and universities, and he dreaded the "cramming process," the hard standardization of curricula rigidly adhered to, the deadening of strong individual interests and enthusiasms. He had been able, at Princeton and at the University of Virginia, to carry on his scheduled courses with his left hand, as it were, while he gave his main strength to his own deeply loved subjects. Scholastic honours in themselves meant nothing to him. What he wanted was to master the subjects which appealed to the natural bent of his mind. His years of concentrated study at home, and during his experience at Atlanta, had only deepened and confirmed his belief that schools do not

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<sup>1</sup>February 17, 1884.

educate a man, but that he educates himself. He was much concerned over this problem upon entering Johns Hopkins—especially after he had looked over his schedule for his first term<sup>1</sup> and found it made up of the usual “cut and dried courses.” He confesses<sup>2</sup> that he has been “somewhat downcast at finding that there was no line of study pursued here that could quite legitimately admit under it such studies as have been my chief amusement and delight during leisure hours for the past five or six years, namely, studies in comparative politics. I have looked into the administrative machinery of England and our own country enough to get a pretty good insight into them, and it was my strong desire to make a similar study of the national governments (as perhaps also of the *local* governmental machinery) of France and Germany. When I got within range of these professors here, however, I found that they wanted to set everybody under their authority to working on what they called ‘institutional history,’ to digging, that is, into the dusty records of old settlements and colonial cities, to rehabilitating in authentic form the stories, now almost mythical, of the struggles, the ups and the downs, of the first colonists here there and everywhere on this then interesting continent—and other rummaging work of a like dry kind, which seemed very

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<sup>1</sup>Woodrow Wilson’s weekly schedule for the first term (as he sent it in a letter to Ellen Axson) was as follows:

Mondays:	12—1	International Law* (with Prof. Adams)
	4—5	Advanced Political Economy (Dr. Ely)
Tuesdays:	12—1	International Law.
Wednesdays:	12—1	International Law.
	4—5	Advanced Political Economy.
Thursdays:	Sources of American Colonial History (Dr. Adams). 12—1.	
Fridays:	12—1	Eng. Constitutional History (Dr. Jameson); 4—5 Advanc’d Pol. Econ; 8—10 Meeting of Seminary of Hist. and Pol. Science.

\*This is really a history of international relations. This schedule is for only the first term, up to Christmas.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, October 16, 1883.



tiresome in comparison with the grand excursions amongst imperial policies which I had planned for myself."

He determines, therefore, to have it out as soon as possible with Dr. Herbert B. Adams, the head of the department, who was to be his "chief" during his course. Never was there a more independent-minded, self-directed youth, jealous even of the education which other men gave him. It will be most interesting to trace, in later years, the effect of these early ideas upon Wilson's programme as an educator: to see how he endeavoured to produce by organization and direction an atmosphere wherein students would revolt against organization and direction as he had done!

In the meantime, he goes about the distracting business of finding a place to live, and finally secures board "in one of the pleasantest portions of the town, within one square of the monument and within three of the University. I am just across the street from the Peabody Institute, in whose splendid library I shall do most of my reading this winter, and my room is bright and comfortable. I moved in this morning, and already begin to feel as if I were in trim for work."

It was at the heart of the city, at 146 North Charles Street.

"My room is not large, but it is a cheery front room with good-looking, shapely furniture in it and lighted by a broad, generous window which looks out upon a handsome square whose fountain and plats of grass and ornamental shrubs are grateful to the eye in the midst of a great city; and across upon the brave architecture of the noble Peabody Institute, as well as upon the graceful shaft of the beautiful Washington monument."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Once, in walking through the square with a friend, Wilson paused to smile at the attitude of the lions at the base of the monument and remarked that it was the only time that Washington was ever "treed."

He was the "only Hopkins man in the house," and he was glad to remove in January, 1884, to 8 McCulloh Street, a neighbourhood of dignified old brick houses with blinds, and little steps that let one quickly into the thoroughfare—houses now worn and shabby, given over to Negro tenants.

"Here I am much better off, established, as I am, in a larger and warmer room and surrounded by what I may, I think, call 'picked specimens' of the University men, fellows of various characters, of course, but of equal enthusiasm in intellectual pursuits, sensible, well-informed, jolly, and unaffected. It's a much more healthful atmosphere for me than that which I have left, because it don't do for me to live for long periods together beyond the reach of congenial companionship. I don't fall into exactly *morbid* moods when I keep to myself, but I do find my thoughts under such circumstances running in ruts which are very tiresome and wearing. At least I get to thinking too much upon that most unprofitable of all subjects, *myself*."<sup>1</sup>

The feature of the university to which he looked forward with the greatest eagerness was the Historical Seminary of which Walter Page and other former students at Johns Hopkins had given glowing accounts. It was the veritable keynote of the system, an analogue, so far as the so-called cultural subjects were concerned, of the laboratory method pursued in the natural sciences. Professors, fellows, and students were all brought together in the room in the old biological building devoted to the famous Bluntschli Library.<sup>2</sup> Upon his first visit Wilson was charmed with the place. It had the atmosphere of quiet

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 16, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. J. C. Bluntschli was professor of international law at the University of Heidelberg, and upon his death German citizens of Baltimore purchased his valuable library and presented it to Johns Hopkins University.

studiousness which was dear to his soul. He felt that this, after all, was his home. There were small tables all about for the use of students, and immediate access to the crowded volumes on the shelves. A motto from Freeman, painted in large letters at one end of the room, peculiarly defined his own sense of the relationship of his favourite studies:

HISTORY IS PAST POLITICS AND POLITICS PRESENT HISTORY

All about were pictures and busts of the heroes who appealed most to the ardent imagination of the young lawyer from Georgia—many of them men who combined, as he longed to combine, statesmanship and scholarship. Upon the tops of the bookcases were, for example, busts of great politicians from Cicero and Macchiavelli to Alexander Hamilton and John C. Calhoun. Upon the walls of the library were the portraits of historians: Niebuhr, Arnold, Ranke, Freeman, Seeley, Bancroft, and Von Holst; of statesmen: Washington, Bismarck, Lincoln, and Gladstone; of publicists like Bluntschli and Bryce.

But the centre of all the interest was the long dull red seminary table<sup>1</sup> around which gathered on Friday nights Dr. Adams's celebrated Historical Seminary. Dr. Adams himself sat at the head of the table, the shrewd and ardent umpire in that intellectual tournament. On his right sat diminutive Dr. Richard T. Ely, who was beginning his long career as a leader in American economic thought. He was only two years older than Wilson. On Adams's right was Dr. J. Franklin Jameson, tall, thin, scholarly looking, a fellow in the university, who was to become one of the most distinguished of American research historians. The other seats were occupied by a group of men who, judged by their later careers, may be called truly remarkable. Albert Shaw was one, long editor of the *Review of*

<sup>1</sup>Still treasured at Johns Hopkins.

*Reviews*; Arthur Yager, whom Wilson afterward appointed as Governor of Porto Rico; Edward W. Bemis and Davis R. Dewey, noted economists; E. R. L. Gould, one-time Chamberlain of New York City; Charles H. Levermore, winner of the Bok Peace Prize; and several others who attained distinction. It was the kind of group—with the meeting of nimble minds—that Wilson most loved.

“ . . . there was positive advantage in the informality of the methods then pursued. . . . Professors, instructors, and lecturers were to us like older brothers . . . instructors and students participated upon an equal basis.”<sup>1</sup>

Wilson soon became the “scribe” of the Seminary, and there are many pages of the record in his beautiful clear handwriting. He also contributed a generous share to the discussions. He read aloud to the Seminary the chapters of his book, *Congressional Government*, as he completed them, subjecting them to the eager fire of discussion which followed.

Dr. Herbert B. Adams was not only gifted as an educational leader, but he was a pioneer in the introduction into American universities of the monographic study of history. He was born near Amherst, Massachusetts, educated at Amherst College and in the universities of Germany, and he had a peculiar genius for inciting young men to attack original problems and acquire sound methods of investigation. He had a rare combination of New England qualities, he was an enthusiastic idealist, a shrewd practical manager. At first, Wilson—impatient and high strung—was sharply critical of Adams and, for the matter of that, of Ely also. Adams skipped too lightly, Wilson thought, over too many subjects, he was “too smooth,” he was too much of a showman to be a thorough scholar. He confided in Dabney that Adams was “a disciple of Macchiavelli, as he himself declares,” and that he allows his pupils to

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Albert Shaw, Memorial to E. R. L. Gould.



starve "on a very meagre diet of ill-served lectures." Ely was "a hard-worker, a conscientious student, and chuck full of the exact data of his subject (like Schonberg's *Handbuch*, which is his economic bible); but he moves only by outside impulse and is not fitted for the highest duties of the teacher."<sup>1</sup> Nothing could satisfy the passion for learning of this impetuous young Southerner! In a later letter to Dabney, he admitted that probably, in his criticisms of Adams and Ely, he "expected too much at first, neglecting the principle . . . that everything of progress comes from one's private reading—not from lectures; that professors can give you always copious bibliographies and sometimes inspiration or suggestion, but never learning."<sup>2</sup> And long afterward, when he himself had acquired a perspective as an educator, he came to place a high estimate upon Dr. Adams's work. He wrote for the memorial in 1902, after Adams's death:

"His head was a veritable clearing house of ideas in the field of historical study, and no one ever seriously studied under him who did not get, in its most serviceable form, the modern ideals of work upon the sources; and not the ideals merely, but also a very definite principle of concrete application in daily study. The thesis work done under him may fairly be said to have set the pace for university work in history throughout the United States."

Three weeks after he entered, Wilson went, one evening, to "have it out" with his chief regarding his own work. He determined to discover whether he would be allowed "to go his own way." He wrote about it to Ellen Axson on October 16, 1883:

"... after tea this evening I went to see Dr. Adams, my chief, and made a clean breast of it: told him that I had a hobby which I had been riding for some years with great

<sup>1</sup>February 17, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>February 14, 1885.

entertainment and from which I was loath to dismount. He received my confidences with sympathy, readily freed me from his 'institutional' work, and bade me go on with my 'constitutional' studies, promising me all the aid and encouragement he could give me, and saying that the work I proposed was just such as he wanted to see done! Do you wonder that I feel elated and encouraged?"

With the way thus clear before him, Wilson attacked his work with a passion of impetuosity and eagerness. He wanted to take on every burden suggested to him, and his instinct for thoroughness drove him to the limit of his strength.

"But I like pressure of this sort. It is as bracing as walking against a strong and keen head wind. The more one has to do, the more one *can* do, and the greater the incentive to do it *well*."<sup>1</sup>

He is asked to speak on Adam Smith before the Seminary, and starts in to read the entire works of Adam Smith in addition to all of his other studies. Dr. Ely, avid himself of spreading a wide knowledge of economic principle, proposes to Wilson and to Davis R. Dewey<sup>2</sup> that they write jointly a history of American economic thought, and Wilson starts a long course of laborious reading with that in view.

"I . . . am wading . . . through innumerable American text writers of the orthodox Ricardian school (Perry, Bowen, Wayland, Vethake, and the rest) for the purpose of writing, with as profound an air of erudite criticism and infallible insight as I can by any means counterfeit, about one-third of the projected treatise. I am to get full credit as joint author of the volume: but the question that is worrying me at present is, will it be creditable?"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 4, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>For many years professor of economics and statistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

<sup>3</sup>Woodrow Wilson to R. Heath Dabney, February 14, 1885.

He comes later to hate and dread the task, thinks himself a fool to have taken it on, and yet refuses to give it up. He writes a long manuscript, practically completing his part of the work.<sup>1</sup>

It is altogether an admirable and thorough objective study of seven principal American economic students and writers. Wilson had evidently been strongly impressed with the methods that Dr. Ely brought fresh from Germany—the “look and see” method, the historical approach to economic problems, the passion to keep close to reality. Although the book was never published, the research which was involved in its preparation gave Wilson a thoroughness of preparation rare among students, still rarer among public men.

He begins immediately also on his “own favourite constitutional studies” and completes and sends off his article for the *Overland Monthly* on “Committee or Cabinet Government” which was published in January (1884). More important still and involving still more furious labour, he soon makes a start<sup>2</sup> on his longer study—at first visualized as “four or five essays on ‘The Government of the Union’”—which was to develop into his first book, *Congressional Government*.

He works prodigiously, passionately, and with a degree of concentration which during all his life was one of his most extraordinary characteristics. He wanted to tear the very vitals out of any subject he attacked, and he learned to do it with astonishing swiftness and thoroughness. Here, as at Princeton and the University of Virginia, his interest is so intense in his own special subjects that he develops at times a positive hostility to his professors: his courses appear as interruptions rather than the purpose of his attendance at the university. He scarcely ever

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<sup>1</sup>This manuscript is still in Dr. Ely's possession.

<sup>2</sup>In January, 1884.

mentions them in his voluminous letters, except now and then to speak with contemptuous boredom of the periodical examinations.

"One of the wags of our class suggested that the lectures to which we are daily invited were intended for our recreation, as agreeable interruptions to our severer studies. The same odd character declared that our fate in having new topics of study constantly thrust upon us reminded him of the unhappy spirits in Dante's *Inferno* who rose to the surface of the burning lake only to be thrust under again by the forked weapons of the guarding demons."<sup>1</sup>

He thus describes his method of work:

"I like to read *much* but not *many things*—at least, not many things *at once*. I go on the principle that father used to announce in very strong English to his pupils in Columbia, namely, that 'the mind is not a prolix gut to be stuffed,' but a thing of life to be stimulated to the exercise of its proper functions, to be strengthened, that is, to do its own thinking. I *can't* 'cram'; I must eat slowly and assimilate, during intervals of rest and diversion. My chief ground of indictment against my professors here is that they give a man infinitely more than he can digest. If I were not discreet enough to refuse many of the things set before me, my mental digestion would soon be utterly ruined."<sup>2</sup>

Thoroughness is ever his keynote—it is veritably a part of his moral code, his religious principles. He tells Ellen Axson—from whom he now hides nothing—that "there is always satisfaction in hard, conscientious work, in the earnest pursuit of a clearly-seen, however distant, ideal."<sup>3</sup> "*I must* be true to myself . . . and no chance of getting my name before the public shall tempt me to do what I

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 27, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, December 22, 1883.

<sup>3</sup>January 8, 1884.



should some day regard as beneath my reputation, as weakly done.”<sup>1</sup>

He can start in without being daunted by a “steady six-days’ reading in English constitutional history,” he can put in his entire Thanksgiving holiday without a qualm, he can remark that “there is a sort of grim satisfaction in tiring one’s mind out, if it be only to prove one’s mastery over natural disinclinations.”<sup>2</sup>

At times he grows impatient, like some high-bred race horse cut with the lash, over his slow progress—but nothing short of discipline and honestly acquired thoroughness of knowledge will satisfy the soul of the man. He writes:

“To be a heeded, a trustworthy, a conscientious thinker nowadays, one must dig in books. He can’t find history anywhere else; he can’t understand present experience unless he knows the experience bound up between the senseless covers of ponderous books or recorded on the faded faces of old manuscripts; so that he *must* focus all his senses in his spectacles, and strive to forget that he was not meant to sit all day in a hard chair at a square table, pouring all his energies out in deciphering stiff print. There’s duty in drudgery as well as in love and in laughter. It’s quite as necessary for the Christian to work as for him to be glad. If he finds himself now and then quite worn out, he deserves sympathy, but not release. Fatigue may bring low spirits—but that’s probably his own fault—certainly not the fault of the work. In short, if a man does not find duty agreeable, he does not deserve gratification.”<sup>3</sup>

### III. THE ARTS OF PERSUASION

It was not only knowledge that Wilson sought with such impetuosity, but he craved, with equal ardour, the

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, June 5, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, January 20, 1885.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

ability to use with power and beauty the knowledge he acquired. In the "solemn covenant" that he made with his much-loved friend Talcott before leaving Princeton, they had agreed not only to "acquire knowledge that we might have power," but that "we would drill ourselves in all the arts of persuasion, but especially in oratory . . . that we might have facility in leading others into our ways of thinking and enlisting them in our purpose."<sup>1</sup>

In short, there must be manner as well as matter. Knowledge and ideas unexpressed or ill-expressed were futile. Facts, in themselves, fertilized no intellectual soil. We have seen how, at Princeton, at the University of Virginia, and at Atlanta, he had been constantly drilling himself as a speaker. Likewise, he tried in every line he wrote, schooled in youth by his exacting father, for accuracy, clarity, and beauty of expression—in short, for style.

Before he had been six weeks at Johns Hopkins, we find him writing to Ellen Axson:

"Style is not much studied here; *ideas* are supposed to be everything—their vehicle comparatively nothing. But you and I know that there can be no greater mistake; that, both in its amount and in its length of life, an author's influence depends upon the power and the beauty of his style; upon the flawless perfection of the mirror he holds up to nature; upon his facility in catching and holding, because he pleases, the attention: and style shall be, as, under my father's guidance, it has been, one of my chief studies. A writer must be artful as well as strong."<sup>2</sup>

He works hard and constantly to improve his powers of expression—never allowing any kind of writing, whether the book he was working on, his reports as scribe of the Seminary, not even his lecture notes or his letters to his friends, to go out carelessly or hastily from under his

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, October 30, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>Letter of October 30, 1883.

hands. Everything must be well done. His vision of the style to be attained is so heaven-sweeping that he is in despair over the snail pace of attainment. He writes:

"I know that my careful compositions of to-day are vastly better than I could have written five, or even three, years ago—and that's very encouraging—but what is my style to what it should be! I have imagined a style clear, bold, fresh, and facile; a style flexible but always strong, capable of light touches or of heavy blows; a style that could be driven at high speed—a brilliant, dashing, coursing speed—or constrained to the slow and stately progress of grave argument, as the case required; a style full of life, of colour and vivacity, of soul and energy, of inexhaustible power—of a thousand qualities of beauty and grace and strength that would make it immortal.—Is it any wonder that I am disgusted with the stiff, dry, mechanical, monotonous sentences in which my meagre thoughts are compelled to masquerade, as in garments which are too mean even for *them*!"<sup>1</sup>

He goes to hear Edmund Gosse lecture and comes away full of admiration and hopeless envy. "The worst of listening to a style like Gosse's is that it makes one so desperately dissatisfied with one's own."<sup>2</sup>

There were men enough at Hopkins—as indeed in every American college then and now—who were "good students," who "made an excellent record," but who never seemed to realize that there was anything in the manner or style of using language, who even seemed to despise it, intimating that it could, if necessary, be easily "picked up." Wilson shoots them through with the shafts of his irony in reporting the reception given to his article in the *Overland Monthly*. He is delighted to have it commended for "both the matter and the style of the

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 8, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, January 6, 1885.

piece." He himself is dissatisfied with the style, it comes so far short of what he desires; it is "too *staccato*"; but the comments amuse him:

"'Wilson,' said one critic, 'You've picked up a capital literary style somewhere. ('Picked up,' indeed! Hasn't my dear father been drilling me in style these ten years past?) Upon whose style did you form it? Did you come by it naturally, or have you consciously modelled after Macaulay?' (Poor Macaulay!) Another friend, who has to follow me in the course of 'lectures' inaugurated by the reading of that remarkable essay upon Adam Smith, coolly asks whether I would be willing to take his materials and 'put them into literary form'! I'm sure I have pain enough in putting my own materials into literary form without going through the like labours for other people.

"I am immensely pleased that the *style* of 'Cabinet or Committee Government?' should have been considered good, because I'm sure that I can write much better prose than that. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

For exactly the same reasons, he studies and practises public speaking; and here, also, he endeavours never to slight any spoken expression—not even an informal talk before his fellow students in the Seminary. He tests his professors by his own strict standards, and finds them too often weak and slatternly in trying to express what they have in mind. He decides that he himself, if ever he comes to be a college professor, will never forget the ideals of the orator. He observes in a letter to Ellen Axson:

"It [oratory] does not generally come into the lectures of college professors; but it should. Oratory is not declamation, not swelling tones and an excited delivery, but the art of persuasion, the art of putting things so as to appeal irresistibly to an audience. And how can a teacher stimulate young men to study, how can he fill them with great

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 16, 1884.



ideas and worthy purposes, how can he draw them out of themselves and make them to become forces in the world without oratory? Perfunctory lecturing is of no service in the world. It's a nuisance."<sup>1</sup>

Success, after all, is no accident: and it was not for nothing that Wilson's courses in after years at Princeton and elsewhere were crowded; that he, beyond any other teacher, was so often voted "the most admired." Neither was his power as an orator in the great days of the Presidency any matter of mere chance.

"Well, I made my speech last night, and my auditors actually seemed delighted. I could not have been more flatteringly listened to or more heartily applauded. This does not argue much for the taste of the Hopkins Literary Society. It is, indeed, only another way of saying that its members are young and haven't heard many speeches from men who enjoy speaking as an intellectual exercise. That's the secret, undoubtedly, of what little success I have had as a speaker. I enjoy it [speaking] because it sets my mind—all my faculties—aglow: and I suppose that this very excitement gives my manner an appearance of confidence and self-command which arrests the attention. However that may be, I *feel* a sort of transformation—and it's hard to go to sleep afterwards."<sup>2</sup>

There is, he says, "absolute joy in facing and conquering a hostile audience . . . or thawing out a cold one",<sup>3</sup> he loves to hear good oratory, and pounces with a critical understanding upon everything that is said. John Bright he considers the greatest of living English orators and regrets that he has never been within sound of his voice.

He is so deeply interested in the subject that he talks of it to the Hopkins Literary Society.

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<sup>1</sup>October 30, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 25, 1884.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, March 18, 1884.

"... I talked ... about *oratory*, its aims and the difficulties surrounding its cultivation in a University, where exact knowledge overcrows everything else and the art of persuasion is neglected on principle. ... Oratory must be full of the spirit of the world: that spirit is excluded from University life."<sup>1</sup>

All of these passionate interests and enthusiasms, all this labour at his special studies, outside of and yet piled upon Wilson's university work, involved the constant danger of overstrain upon a body too frail to bear the racking of a mental engine so powerful and so swift. It was not so much long hours as it was the extraordinary intensity and passion with which he attacked everything he did. "I am too intense!" he cries out in a letter to Ellen Axson. He had indeed broken down twice before—once at Davidson College and later at the University of Virginia. As early as November 1st, we find him writing that "with the utmost indiscretion, I over-taxed my eyes yesterday, and am to-day suffering with a dull ache through my head and with throbbing orbs that refuse all use." Yet, when Christmas comes, he stays with his books without taking a vacation, and seriously overdoes it. He writes:

"I am beginning to think that I made a mistake in working all through the vacation without allowing myself any respite at all. I kept to my books (when I was not writing to you, or my Xmas letters to the home folks) almost all the time, and did not go near any of my friends. I am, as you have no doubt found out for yourself, an excessively proud and sensitive creature (or 'wretch,' as you would say of yourself), and, since I look upon the Xmas season as one specially sacred to *family* reunions and festivities, I did not choose to call upon any of the families of my acquaintance lest I *might*, by some possi-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 28, 1884.

bility, interfere in some way with the freedom of their holiday arrangements. So, in order to escape intolerable loneliness, I went in self-defence to my studies. As a natural consequence, I overdid the business. . . . I am not often subject to the dominion of my nerves, and it requires only a very little prudence to enable me to maintain that mastery over myself and that free spirit of courageous, light-hearted work in which I pride myself."<sup>1</sup>

In the latter part of January, we find him at home in Wilmington "to be nursed," and later in the spring his friend, Dr. Woods, tells him he is "working himself to death." Success does not appease him: it only scourges him to harder effort and during the latter part of his course at Hopkins, with triumph on every hand, he is constantly driving himself beyond his strength, he has "ominous headaches," he is in a "low state of health," he "worries."

There is every evidence, however, in his letters, that he tries to acquire the discipline of mind and of body that will enable him to get the very greatest amount of work in a given time out of his somewhat frail physical machinery. All his life long he was to have this problem constantly with him. A less passionately determined man might easily have given up before it. No victory in his life redounds more to his credit than his conquest of his own frailty. At the age of fifty-five, he could work harder, accomplish far more, than at thirty-five.

#### IV. SOCIAL ENJOYMENT AND FRIENDSHIPS

In presenting this picture of the high-strung student with his eyes so intently fixed upon his vision of future service to the world that he can drive himself to the limit of his endurance in pursuit of it, it must not be assumed that Wilson was a mere dull hack, a toiling slave of his

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 4, 1884.

work. He had then, and for many years afterward, a surprising amount of "leisure" to devote to outside activities of many kinds, to social enjoyment, to the cultivation of friendships, to sheer play. When he did work, he worked with every fibre of his being; it was the burning intensity of his concentration, not the hours he sat at his desk, that wore him out.

At Johns Hopkins, just as at the University of Virginia, we find Wilson being drawn into varied activities connected with university life; and everywhere that he takes hold he impresses himself powerfully upon his associates, he becomes an outstanding figure. He can sing, he can tell delightful stories in the Negro, Scotch, or Irish dialect, and he loves beyond anything else great and good talk. Fellow students remember to this day certain evenings spent in hot discussion with Wilson. He was a Southerner and delighted in "opening the eyes of northerners" to the facts of the Civil War and of reconstruction.

Only a few weeks after he arrives, he joins the glee club and promises to "warble with them every Monday evening." He enjoys it intensely.

"I wish you could hear some of the songs we are to sing, especially some of the absurd college songs. Here's a specimen stanza of one of them (to be sung to the tune of 'I'm a pilgrim and I'm a stranger'):

'I wish I were a hip-po-po-tamus  
And could swim the broad Euphrates and eat grass  
But oh! I am not; alas! I cannot  
Be a hip-po-po, hip-po-po-tamus  
Ch: But I'm a June-bug  
And I'm a fire-fly:  
I can buzz and bump my head against the wall.'

The other stanzas are of a piece with this one, so that you can imagine how chastely classical the song is as a whole! Why is it that the mere fact of being connected with



a college gives grave gentlemen of almost thirty leave to sing in public songs which, under other circumstances, they would not dream of singing? For my part, I rejoice in the chance. The older I get, the more does a boy's spirit seem to possess me and I chafe often not a little under the necessity of having to preserve the dignified demeanour of a man. That's the reason, you see, that I've determined to live at college all my life."<sup>1</sup>

And it is certainly no recluse, no "grind," who can report such an evening as this:

"You will probably hear with deep regret that the great Johns Hopkins University Glee Club met last evening to disband for the season: though it will doubtless comfort you to know that the last act of its life was an act of benevolence. One week ago it sang in the Methodist church at Woodberry (a thriving suburb of Balto.) for the benefit of the 'Woodberry Workingmen's Library and Reading Room.' I wish you could have seen the audience! It was composed for the most part of factory people—of factory girls, truth to tell—and of course such a handsome set of young men as the Club took immensely with such auditors. The 'classical' pieces, and even the milder sort of college songs, did not rouse much enthusiasm, it is true; but the 'three kittens' and the 'Hip-po-pot-a-mus' went straight to their hearts, and will long be of sweet savour in their memories. After the concert we were treated to a very nice supper and came back to town in our four-horse 'bus in such high and musical humour that we doubtless made many peaceful citizens turn uneasily in their beds, as we went roaring and rattling thro' the quiet streets."<sup>2</sup>

On another occasion he goes out to a party and thus describes it afterward in writing to Ellen Axson:

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, February 2, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, April 27, 1884.

"We had a very jolly time, and I am afraid that I was not as dignified as I might have been. The company consisted of the young lady aforesaid, her two sisters, a young damsel from Philadelphia, Miss Woods and two of her brothers, and one or two other men besides myself. We compounded the caramels in the dining room, boiled them in the kitchen, and ate them in the parlour; but before these numerous stages had been passed I had had numerous frolics with the young lady aforesaid and had been three times locked up in the pantry, each time gaining my freedom by making demonstrations towards demolishing the larder, and once having one of the young ladies as a fellow-prisoner. I don't always misbehave so when I go out into company; but candy making is scarcely an occupation requiring much dignity. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

He attends a ball game and thus reports:

"I have been suffering my one-time delight in baseball—which was my chief solace ten or twelve years ago—to draw me out as a witness to the splendid games which one can see here at this season between the 'crack' professional nines of the country: at least I've been to see *two* such games; one I witnessed yesterday afternoon. Just before dinner my friend, Dr. Woods, met me on the street, and, after inspecting me critically, lectured me for 'working myself to death,' declaring that I looked about to break down, if I was not sick already; and so carried me off *vi et armis* to dinner, and after dinner to a ball game. His brother and sister, and a young lady who is visiting the latter, went with us, so that we had a jolly time. I like good company as much as I enjoy a good game of baseball, and, having both, I was *immensely content*, so to speak, though it was marvellously like wasting time, considering all I have to do before the close of the term."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>November 13, 1883.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, April 20, 1884.

He finds joy also in the out-of-doors. He writes in the winter of 1885:

"... Imagine... a man who loves to walk compelled to tread a mill and you will have formed a sort of conception of what it has cost me to read, read, read when the open air so tempted to aimless roving through its bright spaces. It's not so much one's self as other people that one enjoys out-of-doors on days like these—the bright eyes, the elastic step, the rosy cheeks, the easy energy of everybody one meets fill one with a sort of joy in other people's living that can be experienced at no other time."<sup>1</sup>

He is much desired at social gatherings, especially at dinners where there are to be witty speeches. He is apt in responding to toasts. He can "set the table in a roar." He does not indeed unbend easily, and some men who knew him thought him always encased, as one expressed it long afterward, "in a hard and brilliant shell." They were of those to whom he never opened his heart—but among friends he liked and trusted he could give and take the keenest enjoyment. There were moments of a kind of wild gaiety and freedom as intense in its way, as unrestrained, as his devotion to his work. He himself writes of it:

"It may shock you—it ought to—but I'm afraid it will not, to learn that I have a reputation (?) amongst most of my kin and certain of my friends (the Boylston family in Atlanta, for instance) for being irrepressible, in select circles, as a maker of grotesque addresses from the precarious elevation of chair seats, as a wearer of all varieties of comic grimaces, as a simulator of sundry unnatural, burlesque styles of voice and speech, as a lover of farces—even as a dancer of the '*can-can*'!"<sup>2</sup>

Friends and friendships here, and always, made up a vital part of Wilson's life. Like everything else in his

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 21, 1885.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., April 5, 1885.

nature, they were intense and devoted, and many of them endured throughout his whole life. He gave his heart slowly, but when he gave it he gave it completely. He loved to keep up the contacts with his old friends, delighted in hearing from them, and wrote them long letters.

"But, my dear fellow, my having put 'Woodrow,' without introduction of 'T,' on a title page,<sup>1</sup> or anywhere else, gives you no good excuse for dropping 'Tommy' in converse with your chum, who values the nickname as a badge of that old fellowship which is amongst the treasures of his memory, and which it is his ambition to perpetuate in spite of separation and the thousand other ills that college friendship is heir to. You would not call me 'Woodrow' to my face with impunity: and you should pay me the delicate compliment of seeming not to notice my modest efforts to compact my name and avoid the awkward device (so happily characterized by one Ridgeway Wright) of 'parting my name in the middle.'<sup>2</sup>

If this biography discloses nothing else, it will disclose how remarkable were these human relationships and how completely his career rested upon them. Men came to "swear by him," to "believe in him utterly." On the other hand, he could dislike; he could be contemptuous. Of one of his fellow students he remarks impatiently, "X bores me much and often." He nearly perishes while another of them is "walking around his dreary circles of sophistry." Dullness and stupidity irritate him extremely. Time wasted! He had none of the hail-fellow-well-met attitude so dear to the America of the club or smoking room, that grows intimate after ten minutes' conversation and cheapens friendship by confusing it with momentary acquaintance. And when a friendship was once broken it

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<sup>1</sup>*Congressional Government.*

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Charles Talcott, March 25, 1885.



cut so deep that the gulf could never again be bridged. There were no smudgy half lights in Wilson's character!

His intimate letters during the Johns Hopkins period are full of the warmest evidences of these attachments, not only for men like Bridges, Talcott, Webster, and Hiram Woods, who had been at Princeton with him, and Dabney, his choice friend at Virginia, but the new friends he made at Hopkins—Shinn, Shaw, and others.

He writes to Ellen Axson:

"If I have any *best* friend in the world, that friend is Bob. Bridges. . . . I have for a great many years felt towards him as towards a brother: and if we have drifted apart of late years it has been only because of the necessity which has separated our *lives*. It has never weaned my heart from the dear, genuine old Scot. None of Bob. is on the surface: but the deeper you dig the finer the ore. He and Charlie Talcott and Hiram Woods were the *real* friends whom college life gave me for an inspiring possession: and if I keep any friends, I shall, before all others keep them."<sup>1</sup>

Hiram Woods lived in Baltimore, and we hear of the delightful and informal friendship he enjoyed in Woods's home.

"My visit to H's, though accidental, had been long as usual. I happened to pass the house about six o'clock, just before their dinner hour, and Daisy, Hiram's sixteen year old sister, who is one of my chief playmates, banged so lustily on the window at which she was sitting, in her efforts to attract my attention and make me bow to her, that I of course went in to give her a lecture on dignity—and then in came Miss Nellie and Hiram and I was made to stay to dinner and didn't get away till after eleven o'clock. I never do get away from that house much sooner than that: I am made to feel so thoroughly at home and have such a jolly time that I don't realize, until I notice

<sup>1</sup>November 20, 1884.

that all the children of the family have been sent off to bed, that it is high bed-time for older folks.”<sup>1</sup>

Another characteristic of the ardent student was his intense enthusiasm—amounting often to a kind of hero-worship—for some of the leaders of thought who came to lecture at Johns Hopkins. He hid such emotions behind the wall of his reserve—perhaps unfortunately—sharing his true feelings only with his most intimate friends. Just as he could call Bagehot his “master,” and express boundless admiration for Burke, so he could be quite carried away by men who were scholars and combined with their scholarship gifts of oratory, style, personality. They must also be genuine: for he was a devastatingly clear-eyed critic. He said of James Bryce, then making his studies for *The American Commonwealth*, who visited Johns Hopkins in 1883:

“Professor Bryce gave his concluding lecture this afternoon. I have enjoyed the course exceedingly. There are a strength and dash and mastery about the man which are captivating. He knows both what to say and how to say it. A taste of the instruction of such a man makes me all the more conscious of the insipidity of the lectures I hear daily in the classroom.”<sup>2</sup>

And from that time, for many years, he was to hold Bryce in the highest admiration, lure him to Princeton, and carry on quite a correspondence with him. Bryce on his part was to quote from the young student’s book on *Congressional Government* in *The American Commonwealth*.

Professor Josiah Royce visited Hopkins<sup>3</sup> and captivated Wilson.

“I wish that I could live with Dr. Royce for a few months. He is one of the rarest spirits I have met. His is

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, April 12, 1885.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., November 27, 1883.

<sup>3</sup>February, 1884.

one of those very rare minds which exists in a perfectly lucid atmosphere of thought, having never a cloud on its horizon, seeing everything with a clear and unerring vision. He talked to us the other night at the Seminary, and the dullest fellow at the board listened with delight—I don't mean myself!—because he has the faculty of bringing masses of detail into a single luminous picture where they are grouped with a perfection of perspective and a skill of harmonious arrangement which fill the novice, the would-be historical painter, with despair.”<sup>1</sup>

Edmund Gosse thrills him:

“If you heard a ‘grand sermon’ on Sunday, I heard a lecture yesterday which was simply delightful—the best, I think, alike for matter, for style, for manner, that I’ve heard since I’ve been at the Hopkins. It was by Mr. Edmund Gosse, ‘of London, Clark Lecturer on English Literature in the University of Cambridge,’ and was the first of a course of six lectures on ‘The Rise of the Classical School of English Poetry in the Seventeenth Century.’ The special subject of this first lecture was ‘Poetry at the Death of Shakespeare.’ I wish I could retail to you all its good points: but they would lose by being taken from their exquisite setting, even if I could recite them. For elegance, beauty, and freedom of movement the style of the lecture was superior to anything I ever heard, and equal to anything I ever read. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

“I must talk about Mr. Gosse. And there *is* something to tell about him which *can* be briefly told—and which will, I am sure, amuse you. His first three lectures he delivered in evening dress—but he came into his fourth wearing an ordinary walking suit, for which he apologized thus: ‘Gentlemen and Ladies, I must beg you to excuse me for coming before you in this unceremonious garb, but the

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, February 5, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, January 6, 1885.

fact is that I have but just returned from Washington, where I lost both my baggage and my wife. At one time I was afraid that I was going to lose you too. But happily I am here—and I am so overjoyed at seeing *you* that I assure you my other losses seem quite insignificant!’ He has a delightful vein of this un-English humour when he chooses to give it leave!”<sup>1</sup>

His admiration of Henry Ward Beecher is salted with shrewd criticism:

“I went last night to hear Beecher lecture, and was splendidly entertained for an hour and forty minutes, though he was constantly offending my tastes and denying my opinions. His subject was ‘The Reign of the Common People,’ and he sent through it a stream of strong, shallow, noisy, irregular, evident, picturesque, taking talk. Nobody wanted him to stop; nobody failed to admire the skill and popular force of the man; nobody carried away much instruction. He proved that dilute sense may fill a hall with intent listeners; he did *not* prove that much greater eloquence, much stronger reasoning, much more compact sense could not fill it quite as full. Dan’l Webster could have had as great success, but Beecher paid much less for his.”<sup>2</sup>

#### V. THE CONSTITUTION MAKER

Another of Wilson’s ardent interests, just as at Davidson, at Princeton, at Virginia, and even during his brief months in Atlanta, was in helping to reorganize and lead the debating society. Here, as always, we find him revising the constitution—and characteristically along the lines of the British Parliament, with a “government” that could be “supported” or “turned out” as it proved successful in maintaining its position in any given debate.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 14, 1885.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*



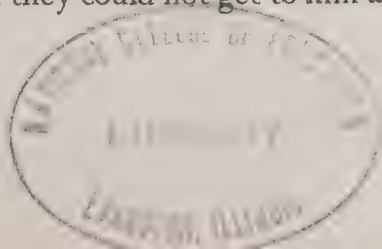
"Well," he writes Ellen Axson on December 18, 1884, "I have given the Hopkins literary society a new name, and a brand-new constitution of my own composition. I even wrote a set of by-laws for them, and presided over the meeting at which they adopted all the new methods. They have fallen in with my plans with remarkable unanimity: it remains to be seen how they will operate them. It will require some parliamentary talent to infuse real life into the 'Hopkins House of Commons.'"

"It is characteristic of my whole self that I take so much pleasure in these proceedings of this society. It reminds me of the time when I piloted a new constitution to adoption in the Society at the University of Virginia."

He appends to this account of his work as a constitution maker this extraordinary bit of self-revelation:

"I have a sense of power in dealing with men collectively which I do not feel always in dealing with them singly. In the former case the pride of reserve does not stand so much in my way as it does in the latter. One feels no sacrifice of pride necessary in courting the favour of an assembly of men such as he would have to make in seeking to please one man."

How well Wilson knew himself when he wrote that paragraph! It illuminates, like a searchlight, his entire career. What power he had with men in the mass, how often he stumbled in his contacts with individuals. Men charged him with coldness, hardness, when it was an incurable shyness—Scotch reserve, Southern pride—behind which he hid his often molten emotions. We find him far more self-revealing, even confidential, in his public addresses than in conversation, save with his most intimate friends. For that reason the mass, because it could look in at the man's soul, always understood him better, and always will, than many of those who complained that they could not get to him at the White House



or at Paris. It was a deep-seated characteristic of his nature which, if it was sometimes a fault, was often a virtue: if it led him into mistakes in personal relationships, it contributed powerfully in the great period of his career to his hold upon the people of the world. Roosevelt's power by contrast was largely personal. It lay in his hold upon individuals, an emotion stirred by a warm hand-clasp, a robust slap on the back, an appreciative personal letter, a sense of commonness. It will wane as emotions do, when individuals pass away. Wilson's power lay in his hold upon the mass to whom he somehow gave vision and courage and faith: it will not pass.

Wilson's leadership of the new organization at Johns Hopkins added such a keen zest to its work that the members, just before Wilson left the university in June, 1885, embarrassed and yet pleased him greatly by their expressions of appreciation:

"I must tell you, while I think of it," he writes to Ellen Axson, "of a gratifying surprise I had before leaving Balto. 'The Hopkins House of Commons' sent me a pair of very handsome, tasteful bronze figures for the mantel-piece (two cavaliers just 'drawing' on one another)<sup>1</sup> in token of their esteem and of their appreciation of my efforts in their behalf. They hoped that my approaching marriage would bring me as much happiness as my connection with them had brought them advantage."<sup>2</sup>

#### VI. TASTES IN LITERATURE, ART, AND THE DRAMA

Since the Johns Hopkins period represented the capstone of Wilson's university years, everything that helps to give a clear conception of the entire mind of the man at that time becomes of importance. It is easy to exhibit

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<sup>1</sup>These cavaliers were long household gods. They followed him through Princeton, they were at the White House, he kept them in his own room in the last days at S Street.

<sup>2</sup>June 4, 1885.

his passionate interest in his own studies, but how "round" a man was he? What were his tastes? His early reading, especially in the English novelists and essayists, we know was desultory: we caught him at the University of Virginia with Shelley in his hand, walking in a wood. He was a lover of Keats. He had read much of Shakespeare, partly with a keen sense of enjoyment, partly as a duty. *Henry V* was his favourite play. He also followed carefully the best American and English reviews, the *Nation* particularly, and the *Edinburgh Review*. But compared with many students of his years and cultivation he had read comparatively little—little of current poetry or prose, until he came to know Ellen Axson, no books in foreign languages, though he could read French, scarcely any scientific works, although it was in the glorious era of Huxley and Spencer—he did read at a later time Kidd's *Social Evolution*—and little or no philosophical, metaphysical, or argumentative religious works of any kind.

Ellen Axson, when she came into his life, greatly widened his horizons in literature as in art and architecture. He sends her a "clumsy volume" of Ruskin—"When we get rich we can get a better"—and remarks:

"I have never read much of Ruskin—only enough to know that his wonderful prose has a great fascination for me—but I have read sufficient to enable me to appreciate what you say about the changes which have come since 'Modern Painters' was written. I too had noticed the greater gentleness and tolerance of his later judgments. Age has mellowed him—has, too, made him broader and more catholic in his sympathies. If he could have begun in such a temper, he would have been betrayed into much fewer extravagances."<sup>1</sup>

He copies for her "delectation a few more passages from Swinburne's 'Tristram of Lyonesse.'" "I am bent

<sup>1</sup>March 11, 1884.

upon having you enjoy with me these exquisite bits of fancy and music."<sup>1</sup> He reads with keen interest Hamerton's *Intellectual Life* and then sends Ellen Axson "an extract I have just hit upon" which "is from an essay on Shelley by my master, Bagehot—the most vivacious, the most racily real, of writers on life—whether the life be political, social, or separately intellectual."<sup>2</sup>

He discovers with enthusiasm Thomas Bailey Aldrich:

"I have just returned from a pilgrimage to the Peabody library, made to find certain lines called 'Palabras Cariñosas' by one T. B. Aldrich. I found them, read them and re-read them, with a delight which you may interpret at your leisure. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

He delights in Augustine Birrell's *Obiter Dicta*—finds it of "delicious originality," but cannot quite follow Ellen Axson in her intense enthusiasm for Browning; *Lorna Doone* he enjoys greatly, ranks it "amongst our 'classics.'"<sup>4</sup> He had already, during vacations, begun to read aloud with Ellen Axson, a practice which continued with unending enjoyment for thirty years.

All his life he read poetry and essays for inspiration, for the joy they gave him, but because one poem of an author fascinated him he felt no obligation to read anything more. What he enjoyed he wished to read again and again. His enthusiasm for Swinburne's "Tristram" has already been referred to—he liked especially the passage describing Iseult's unafraidness of the sea, but he never knew nor cared to know Swinburne's other poems, intensely disliked, indeed, Swinburne's unbalanced and vehement critical essays. He loved certain of Matthew Arnold's poems, "Dover Beach," "Rugby Chapel," but spoke contemptuously of Arnold's literary and theological

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<sup>1</sup>April 22, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>November 22, 1884.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 10, 1885.



criticism. Though Wordsworth was a lifelong comfort to him, and "The Happy Warrior" was his favourite poem, he never read the longer poems, not even, probably, "The Prelude." It was a great experience to hear him read aloud the poems he most admired, the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," for example, or Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind." He loathed Byron.

Not only did Ellen Axson bring to him the wealth of her own reading and thought, but he began, even before they were married—and continued still more eagerly afterward—to show her everything he wrote, discuss with her all of his serious studies, share with her his ardent enthusiasms, and seek her clear-eyed criticism. "... a man with any of the keen sensibilities of the student," he wrote to her, "must be miserable if he have a study into which his wife cannot come as his close companion."<sup>1</sup>

Not long after they were engaged, he developed with enthusiasm his intense concern in the correct use of language, accurate pronunciation. She expressed keen interest and asked for a set of "rules and lists" to guide her, and he at once drew them up to send to her.

"The broad, Italian, sound of 'a' (as in father) seems to be most common

"1. Before *th*: e. g., path, bath, wrath;

"2. Before an 'l' whose sound is merged in that of some neighbour consonant: e. g., half, calf, calm, balm, palm, psalm, etc.

"3. In *au* before an 'n' or 'f' sound: e. g., laugh, launch, vaunt, flaunt, aunt, etc.

"The *intermediate* sound of 'a' (the Italian 'a' uttered with a very light touch) between the 'a' in *fat* and the 'a' in father, is most common before 'f,' 's,' or 'n.' Here are a *few* examples: advance, advantage, after, amass, answer, ask, basket, branch, brass, cast, chance, chant, class,

<sup>1</sup>October 18, 1883.

contrast, craft, disaster, draft, example, fast, glance, glass, grass, grant, lass, last, pant, pass, past, pastor, plaster, raft, repast, sample, shaft, task, vast.

"These will be enough to practise on for the present, won't they? I have given, as you request, only those that seem at least to follow a *rule*."<sup>1</sup>

He delighted in her "zeal for the new pronunciation."

"We will purvey for each other in separate literary fields," he says in one ardent letter, and then goes on to tell her of "several very simple, feasible, and delightful plans" which he has thought about, by which she can give "the best possible aid merely by doing, as my proxy and for my benefit (you see how selfish I am!), such reading as you delight most in doing." He must "work away unceasingly in one or two rigid specialties" and she "can find out for me what is going on in the world, what subjects are commanding most space in the magazines . . . can recite to me the plots and read to me the choice parts of the best novels of the day, and fill my too prosy brain with the sweetest words of the poets; can, in short, keep my mind from dry rot by exposing it to an atmosphere of fact and entertainment and imaginative suggestion."<sup>2</sup>

His interest in art and in architecture, which in later years became considerable, was unformed at this time.

He horrified Ellen when she went to New York to study art by confusing the Art Students' League with Cooper Institute. But, knowing her intense interest, he eagerly visited the galleries and looked into the art books in the Peabody Library:

" . . . not many days ago I was attracted by a card which announced, from behind the generous pane of a broad window, that a collection of Mr. Whistler's etchings and 'dry points' was on exhibition within. In I went, of

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, February 17, 1885.

<sup>2</sup>January 23, 1885.

course; and, after 'being constrained by a handsome young woman to buy a catalogue which I did not want, I set myself to as critical an examination of Mr. Whistler's productions as my ignorance of artistic canons would allow. Well, I must confess that, in my unenlightened soul, I was disgusted, and more than ever indifferent to the possession of the catalogue, except that *it* was much more interesting as a curiosity than the etchings are as pictures. Some of Mr. Whistler's critics object that his later productions, of which those I saw are specimens, are mere *suggestions*; I think they would have been nearer the truth in some cases if they had said that they suggest *nothing*—a few lines, a possible face, a conjectural group, a hazy beginning of something—one cannot tell certainly what the picture might have been, had it been completed; though here and there one does find a sketch suggestive of life and beauty. As compared with these unsatisfactory dashes of helter-skelter lines and irresponsible patches of shade, recommend me to the staring *chromo* with its honest ugliness!"<sup>1</sup>

He went to the Walters gallery in Baltimore and was especially enthusiastic over Alma Tadema's *Sappho*, de Neuville's *Attack at Dawn*, and Dagnan-Bouveret's *An Accident*—all story-telling pictures. His taste was to change greatly in later years. He wrote of Ellen's art studies:

"I have the sincerest sympathy with your present studies for various reasons: first and foremost, of course, because they are yours; but scarcely less because I have always had, and been conscious of having, a great store of (potential) enthusiasm for just such occupations and accomplishments. I have never suspected myself of possessing artistic talents, it is needless to say, but I have always known myself capable of entering into the artist's feelings

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, December 18, 1883.

and of understanding his delights. I have always revered the power of artistic creation above the power of poetic creation.

"I suppose that it would be idle for me to hope ever to be an orator if I did *not* have these artistic sympathies. It has been one of the peculiarities—one of the few grave misfortunes—of my life that I have hitherto *known* least of the two things that move me most, poetry and painting. My sensibilities in those directions seem to me like a musical instrument seldom touched, like a harp disused."<sup>1</sup>

The theatre he enjoyed intensely. He had stolen away from Princeton while a student there to hear Booth as *Iago* and *Othello* in New York, and had taken every other chance his means would permit to see and hear the best he could find.

"Well, I had my treat last night. I saw Irving and Miss Terry in *Hamlet*; and I'm sure it will be many a long day before I see such acting again. Never have I seen anything more perfect or more touching, more exquisitely natural and pitiful, than Miss Terry's simulation of madness in the fourth act. It simply and literally beggars description. As for Irving, his acting is characterized by great ups and downs. His voice, for one thing, though wonderfully fine in the expression of deep or violent emotion, is quite incapable of the lighter and easier tones. It is fair to say that his *Hamlet* is not so *uniformly* fine as Booth's; but, on the other hand, his acting rises, in certain scenes, to a pitch of grandeur such as Booth has never reached, such as, probably, he cannot reach. Irving was unsurpassably great, for instance, in the scene in which the mock play is enacted. It was, as far as his acting was concerned, the crowning scene of all. When the play began he was lying at Ophelia's feet away from and opposite the throne, his intense eyes fixed upon the features of the King; but as

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<sup>1</sup>November 23, 1884.



the players proceeded, and the significant plot of the play approached its climax, he slowly slid, with the movement and the glare of a serpent, towards the royal seat till he lay at the foot of the throne: whence he rose and with indescribable accents of hate hissed his explanation of the play into the King's guilt-blanchèd face. The King in terror calls for lights, the company breaks up in questioning consternation, and Hamlet remains standing on the steps of the throne, celebrating his triumph with maniacal laughter! I ne'er shall see the like again! Oh, that you could have seen it!

"It's absurd for me to try to describe such a scene; but the fact that I have attempted it may serve to show how powerfully I was affected by it. Miss Terry, with her sweet face and wonderful acting, quite won my heart—but only my *audience*, my dramatic, heart, not the one that belongs to you!"<sup>1</sup>

#### VII. RELIGIOUS IDEAS

Religion was so much an ingrained habit in Wilson's life that it never rose to the point of speculation, or discussion, let alone doubt. Ellen Axson, although a true daughter of the Presbyterian Manse, with as deep a religious tradition as he, could plague her rest with questionings, could pore over Kant, and study the conflicts of science and religion, but Wilson remarked that "so far as religion is concerned discussion is adjourned." He had an absolutely immovable faith in God. He rested upon it and drew strength from it like a prophet of old. He believed utterly that "all things work together for good"—if one obeyed the rule. He wrote to Ellen Axson:

"Do you really think . . . that I was trying to persuade you that all things do *not* work together for good? I would as soon try to persuade you that there is no God. I meant

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, December 28, 1883.

only that your little piece of philosophy, as you put it in one of your letters, would justify one in letting things drift, in the assurance that they would drift to a happy result. I was simply expressing, too awkwardly, no doubt, my idea of *how* all things work together for good—through the careful performance of our duty.”<sup>1</sup>

He believed absolutely in the immortality of the soul; he could comfort Ellen Axson upon the tragic death of her father:

“Your dear father, however sad or tragic his death may have been, is happy now. His Saviour, we may be sure, did not desert his servant at the supreme moment; and it is a joy to think that he is now reunited to the sweet, noble mother who went before him.”<sup>2</sup>

His religion was to him a “shield and a buckler.”

“Does it frighten you to know that the city has temptations for me? It need not. I am quite sure that my religion is strong enough to make the temptations harmless. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

He was a faithful observer of the Sabbath day, and his letters are full of references to his attendance at church, the substance and quality of the preaching, with frequent intimations that one can, after all, hear the ancient and accepted doctrine only in the Presbyterian Church. Sometimes his accounts of his church experiences have a turn of humour:

“I recently made a great ‘find,’ namely, a Presbyterian church where there is first rate preaching—first rate by the Baltimore standard, which is not very high or exacting—and plenty of pretty girls. I am now a regular attendant upon its services. One don’t often find attractive orthodoxy in the pulpit and beauty in the pews, so that I am specially gratified because of this discovery. See the

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<sup>1</sup>May 25, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>June 1, 1884.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, December 4, 1883.

advantage of a strict training in doctrine! No amount of beauty in the damsels of an Episcopalian or Methodist or Baptist church could have led me off; but beauty in one's own church may be admired weekly with a conscience void of offence. By-the-way my orthodoxy has stood still another test. I was invited a short time since to join the finest choir in town; but it was a Methodist choir, and I declined. True, I did not care to join *any* choir; but of course the controlling motive in this case was connected with the question of doctrine. Should I be asked to sing in a Presbyterian choir, I could easily find some other, equally creditable, reason for saying 'nay': for Presbyterian choirs should be of the best."<sup>1</sup>

Yet it is never the mere creed of the church, nor even its value as an institution that holds him: it is the life and character it represents. Unless it produces results in virtue, power, beauty, it is worthless. This runs through all his utterances upon religion, throughout his life. It must be a "living contact with God." For this reason the discussions of "verbal inspiration," of minute dogma, and especially the incipient roarings of the contest, even then beginning, between Fundamentalism and Modernism, were infinitely wearisome and irritating to him. He sided wholly with his scientific uncle, Professor James Woodrow, who was one of the pioneer leaders of modernism in America and among the first to suffer the discipline of embattled orthodoxy. The great church trials took place while Wilson was at Johns Hopkins. He wrote to Ellen Axson:

"The attack on uncle James Woodrow which I predicted has begun, and very much in the way—though not from the quarter—I expected. . . . It *must* be reckoned wicked to bring upon God's church such reproach of spite and bigotry. . . . If Uncle J. is to be read out of the Semi-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, March 23, 1884.

nary, Dr. McCosh ought to be driven out of the church, and all private members like myself ought to withdraw without waiting for the expulsion which should follow belief in evolution. If the brethren of the Mississippi Valley have so precarious a hold upon their faith in God that they are afraid to have their sons hear aught of modern scientific belief, by all means let them drive Dr. Woodrow to the wall.”<sup>1</sup>

A little later he wrote:

“You will be disgusted and bitterly disappointed to learn that *Dr. Mack* has been elected to fill Uncle James’s place! I hope that the Seminary *will* die, and die soon, if such pestiferous fellows as he are to be put into its hitherto honoured chairs. *He* in the chair of Science and Religion! He knows about as much of the facts of the one as about the true spirit of the other! What *is* to become of our dear church! She has indeed fallen upon evil times of ignorance and folly!—But enough of that—my thoughts are too harsh for the pages of this letter.”<sup>2</sup>

Here his mind, like that of his much admired uncle, “had no penumbra.” “God’s word and His works cannot be antagonistic.” He had thus a mighty and absolute faith: who can prevail against the man of vision and power who knows for a certainty that he has God with him to give him the victory!

#### VIII. WRITING “CONGRESSIONAL GOVERNMENT”

It is not often that a busy post-graduate student takes on the writing of two books in addition to all of his other work. Reference has been made already to the *History of American Economic Thought*, upon which Wilson was collaborating with Dr. Ely, and for which he was reading prodigiously. But this was by no means his chief interest.

<sup>1</sup>June 26, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 11, 1885.



He was absorbed in his own studies in political science and administration, and soon after entering Johns Hopkins he began to consider expanding the ideas set forth in his famous article on "Cabinet Government in the United States," written while he was a senior at Princeton and published in the *International Review* for August, 1879. He had been continuously studying the backgrounds of his subject in the years at the University of Virginia, at home in Wilmington, and during the disillusioning months in Atlanta. He had read widely in English and American constitutional history; and had become intensely dissatisfied, as a student, with the ordinary method of presenting the facts of government—as a finished machine, not as a living organism. In Bagehot's history of the British Constitution he had found the very model he craved, and had formed a purpose, as ardent as his own intense nature, to treat the American government in much the same fashion. By showing not merely how it was "written down in the Constitution," but how it worked in actual practice, he could make clear its defects and weaknesses.

This interest was by no means purely academic. Wilson was of too hot a temperament, too eagerly interested in life, ever to be merely academic. It was his own sharp sense of the sad state of American institutions—the wide departure from the earlier American, and English, ideal of democratic government—which moved him profoundly. It must be recalled that nearly his whole life up to that time had been spent amidst the disorder of war, the positive anarchy and despotism of reconstruction. The period from 1870 to 1883, when he entered Johns Hopkins, the administrations of Grant, Hayes, and Arthur, represented as low an ebb of statesmanship as the country had known. Sordid ambitions, narrow views, corruption, and spoils—but most of all intellectual poverty—marked

political action generally. What a contrast to the great and moving parliamentary statesmanship of Great Britain with Gladstone, John Bright, and Disraeli—though he despised Disraeli—holding the centre of the stage. How different from our own earlier days, when the problems of government were debated by such forensic giants as Webster, Calhoun, and Clay, such leaders as Lincoln and Douglas. It was much the same question that James Bryce put a few years later,<sup>1</sup> after making his expert and impartial studies of the condition of the nation, when he headed one of his chapters of *The American Commonwealth*, "Why Great Men Are Not Chosen Presidents."

These things weighed heavily upon him as a citizen concerned for the welfare of his country, and as an ardent and ambitious youth who longed himself to play a part in the great affairs of the nation—who felt, indeed, in his own soul, the capacity for leadership.

Power was hopelessly divided under our system of checks and balances, Congress was controlled and strangled by committees, there was no responsible leadership, a government could not be instantly held accountable, as in the British system, for mistakes. Not only had he written upon this subject, but he had set up numerous experiments by organizations at Princeton and Virginia—and now the "Hopkins House of Commons,"<sup>2</sup> wherein the methods of responsible government could be tried out. While a lawyer in Atlanta he had carried the same idea a step further and suggested the actual changes that would be necessary—constitutional and otherwise—to introduce responsible government into the American system, and published his article in *The Overland Monthly* for January, 1884. It was such a remarkable bit of searching analysis and revealed so clearly notable powers of political in-

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<sup>1</sup>1889.

<sup>2</sup>Later he organized a similar group at Wesleyan College.

ventiveness<sup>1</sup> that it attracted much attention, especially among his professors and keen fellow students at Johns Hopkins. Here was a man capable of thinking upon the fundamentals of government, and discussing them in terms of the highest constructive criticism.

He was encouraged to go forward with a further development of the same theme—basing his observations upon a wider study of government, both in America and abroad. He was on fire with ambition to do a great and useful work, a work that would reform the institutions of the nation. He wrote to Ellen Axson:

“I want to contribute to our literature what no American has ever contributed, studies in the philosophy of our institutions, not the abstract and occult, but the practical and suggestive, philosophy which is at the core of our governmental methods; their use, their meaning, ‘the spirit that makes them workable.’ I want to divest them of the theory that obscures them and present their weakness and their strength without disguise, and with such skill and such plenitude of proof that it shall be seen that I have succeeded and that I have added something to the resources of knowledge upon which statecraft must depend.”<sup>2</sup>

On January 1, 1884, he is ready to begin work and writes eagerly:

“I’ve opened the new year by a day of diligent work on my favourite constitutional studies. I’ve planned a set of four or five essays on ‘The Government of the Union,’ in which it is my purpose to show, as well as I can, our constitutional system as it looks in operation. My desire and ambition are to treat the American constitution as Mr.

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Charles E. Merriam of Chicago University says in *Four American Party Leaders*, pp. 50-51: “Political inventiveness of a notable type was forecast in Wilson’s youthful essay on ‘Congressional Government,’” but regrets that he did not follow up the subject.

<sup>2</sup>October 30, 1883.

Bagehot (do you remember Mr. Bagehot, about whom I talked to you one night on the veranda at Asheville?) has treated the English Constitution. His book has inspired my whole study of our government. He brings to the work a fresh and original method which has made the British system much more intelligible to ordinary men than it ever was before, and which, if it could be successfully applied to the exposition of our Federal constitution, would result in something like a revelation to those who are still reading the *Federalist* as an authoritative constitutional manual. An immense literature has already accumulated upon this subject; but I venture to think that the greater part of it is either irrelevant or already antiquated. 'An observer who looks at the living reality will wonder at the contrast to the paper description. He will see in the life much which is not in the books; and he will not find in the rough practice many refinements of the literary theory.'<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to express his own trepidation at the greatness of his task, and outlines clearly the plan for the book which was later to be called *Congressional Government*:

"Of course I am not vain enough to expect to produce anything so brilliant or so valuable as Bagehot's book; but, by following him afar off, I hope to write something that will be at least worth reading, if I should ever publish it, and which will, in any event, serve as material for college lectures which will put old topics in a somewhat novel light. Does this big programme make you wonder what I've been writing to-day? Something very ordinary. Only an historical sketch of the modifications which have been wrought in the federal system and which have resulted in making Congress the omnipotent power in the government, to the overthrow of the checks and balances to be found in the 'literary theory.' This is to serve as an in-

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson.



troduction to essays upon Congress itself, in which I wish to examine at length the relations of Congress to the Executive, and that legislative machinery which contains all the springs of federal action.

"But what sort of New Year's letter is this I'm writing! I've been so absorbed in my pet subject all day that I forget myself: I can't easily think of anything else. Fortunately for me, you've promised not to 'frown' on these severe pursuits of mine. Some day I'll appall you by reading this introductory essay, or one of its successors, to you, just to show you how dull I can be upon occasion."

He works steadily and hard at his task, writing out his chapters first in the beautiful clear-cut characters of his shorthand, as delicately pencilled as a drawing, afterward copying them out on his typewriter. Some of them he reads aloud to fellow students—Albert Shaw was one of them—eagerly seeking criticism. In March he says:

"On last Thursday my Calligraph was going all day long, as it was also on Friday and Saturday: for 'essay No. 3' was finished on Wednesday evening and had then to be copied in the fair hand of my machine. Copying is a terribly tedious business—especially copying one's own work; and the copying of these three essays is by no means a small job: there will be about one hundred and seventy pages of—of *calligraphiscript*—by the time I have copied the forty pages that remain: and you can imagine the effect upon my spirits of this task of grinding off hour after hour the sentences of which I am now so tired—of spending a whole day with the style which is so disgusting to me. It is very unnatural, I know, to have such feelings towards my own offspring, but I can't like it. I am comforting myself, as Lysias did, with the reflection that others into whose hands these essays come will probably read them only once and so escape the contempt bred by familiarity."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>March 30, 1884.

On April 4th he takes his courage in his hands—keeping his purpose secret—and sends the first few chapters to Houghton, Mifflin & Company of Boston. He says in his letter:

“As a constitutional study, the subject is, as you will perceive, a new one. Not that I have brought out any hitherto unseen facts; I have simply grouped facts which have not before stood together, and thus given them the setting of a new treatment. I have modelled my work chiefly on Mr. Bagehot’s essays on the English Constitution, though I have been guided in some points of treatment by the method followed in some of the better volumes of Macmillan’s admirable ‘English Citizen Series.’”

The response he receives, while not definite as to the publication of the book when completed, gives him great encouragement, and he goes at his task with renewed determination.

When vacation comes that summer, he returns to the Manse on the hill at Wilmington and loses no time in spreading out his books, setting up his typewriter in the little upper room and proceeding to work harder—if that were possible!—than he did at Johns Hopkins. Yet it chafes him that he cannot work faster:

“The essay on the Senate (‘No. 4’) is not running on so easily or so fast as it would were I feeling quite well; but every day sees some advance in it, and the slow, laboured pace is doubtless friendly to *thoroughness*. I shall be quite satisfied if I can complete it by the end of this month.”<sup>1</sup>

He finds no intellectual companionship at Wilmington, no understanding of what he is trying to do. He is vastly amused and irritated by the bookseller who has never heard of Buckle or his history, and the librarian who says she knows of no history of civilization but *Guizotte’s*, “so

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, July 3, 1884.

she persisted in pronouncing the honoured name of poor dead M. Guizot." He gives a vivid picture, however, of his life during the vacation:

"Dear mother makes pastoral calls, and I make some or none according to my mood. I write after breakfast, drive before supper, and after supper generally read aloud while dear mother sews or embroiders. Between the morning writing and the afternoon driving, I attend to father's business letters and to my own correspondence, and, for the rest, follow my own devices quite diligently. Although we have *one* excellent road, we have *no* good streets; but dear mother is very fond of her gentle little mare and we go as regularly as possible over the same route, which supplies us with plenty of fresh, sea-scented air, but with no fresh scenery. Nellie's jog-trot (Nellie is the mare) is what you would easily recognize as a violent anti-climax to the paces of 'Cousin Ed's' dashing nag; but the little animal is a model 'lady's-horse,' and the dear lady who owns and constantly drives her could hardly do without her faithful services. Her daily rides in the buggy give her just the recreation and exercise she needs after her busy house-keeping. This driving, however, is declared, or rather decreed, *not* exercise enough for me, her big son, and I am urged to inflict upon myself various walks and gymnastic performances which I grumblingly regard as much too big a price to pay for the privilege of devoting my mornings to study. And yet a chap does need some powerful antidote when he takes original composition in large doses. There is not, I take it, *half* as much wear and tear in mastering the contents of a score of books as in writing *one*. At least I'm sure that no amount of reading taxes me so severely as I am taxed by two or three hours of concentration upon my writing."<sup>1</sup>

During all the years of preparation for writing his book,

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, August 31, 1884.

he never actually attended a session of Congress—although at Baltimore he was only an hour away.<sup>1</sup> It was his belief that he could understand the real business of government, which was conducted behind the closed doors of committee rooms, better from a thorough study of the documents than by the observation of the procedure on the floor.

Immediately after his return to Johns Hopkins in October, the great manuscript is completed. He writes:

"I have just finished preparing my *ms.* to be sent to Boston and am about to start out for the express office. Then I shall be free to turn to my University work, until the *ms.* is returned and has to be sent to some other publishing house!"<sup>2</sup>

He has sent the work to Houghton, Mifflin & Company—and like the wholly unknown author that he is, he is prepared for the worst.

Already the early chapters have been read aloud at the Historical Seminary, and now he reads the later ones which he has written during the summer.

"I am to read the third of my essays at the Seminary to-night—'to set a high standard of work for the new men,' says Dr. Adams' blarney—it is the one, you may remember, on 'Revenue and Supply,' the driest of the lot. I am rather anxious as to how it will 'take.' . . . I read the two first last year, and Dr. A. now wants the rest in order, at intervals through the year."<sup>3</sup>

He reports on the result of the reading the next day:

"I read at the Seminary last night for an hour and a quarter—and my audience looked as tired as I was when I got through. They applauded (to wake themselves up)

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<sup>1</sup>So far as the record discloses, he was never in the halls of Congress but once before he went there in 1913 to deliver his first message.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, October 7, 1884.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, October 17, 1884.



and Dr. Adams praised, but what a dose it was! Seriously, I think I made a very favourable impression; the work bore evidences of *thoroughness*, anyhow, though it was *not* entertaining, and so may have evinced capacity which was appreciable; but of course I can't tell what my auditors thought. They [may] have voted me a bore for aught I know!"

We do not need to speculate upon the impression the reading of these papers made, for we have the report in the record of the Seminary regarding one of them.

"The principal paper of the evening was by Mr. Wilson who read the introduction to his work on Representative Government. . . .

"Mr. Wilson's work is better than anything in that line that has been done heretofore in the Seminary. . . ."

He holds his breath during all the weeks following, hoping yet fearing to hear from the publishers. He writes:

"No . . . I haven't heard a word from H. M., & Co., though it is now five weeks since I sent them my *mss.* They are either considering the matter with unusual care or have rejected the thing and forgotten, amidst the election excitements, to return it. The only *certainty* is that I am very anxious and have suspended all definite expectations in the matter."<sup>1</sup>

On November 28th he can write exultantly that he has "some exceptionally good news":

"They have actually offered me as good terms as if I were already a well-known writer! The success is of such proportions as almost to take my breath away—it has distanced my biggest hopes."

He is momentarily in a seventh heaven of elation, but this is followed almost immediately by a temperamental reaction which is highly characteristic of the man. Success never long satisfies him. His aspirations are inappeasable.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 11, 1884.

He can rest upon no victory: he must press on to greater things. Within a week he is down with the "blues," and writes:

"It *was* unreasonable, I confess, to be low-spirited so soon after hearing of Houghton and Mifflin's decision about my *mss*; but then you must remember that I am constituted, as regards such things, on a very peculiar pattern. Success does not flush or elate me, except for the moment. I could almost wish it did. I *need* a large infusion of the devil-me-care element. The acceptance of my book has of course given me the deepest satisfaction and has cleared away a whole storm of anxieties: it is an immense gain every way. But it has sobered me a good deal too. The question is, What next? I must be prompt to follow up the advantage gained: and I must follow it up in the direction in which I have been preparing to do effectual political service. I feel as I suppose a general does who has gained a first foothold in the enemy's country. I must push on: to linger would be fatal. There is now a responsibility resting upon me where before there was none. My rejoicing, therefore, has in it a great deal that is stern and sober, like that of the strong man to run a race."<sup>1</sup>

There is the grand moment, known to every author, when he feels the actual bound copies of his first book in his hands—a never-to-be-forgotten thrill. To whom shall he send the first fruits of his spirit—the book over which he has toiled long, hoped greatly, despaired bitterly! In Wilson's case there could be no doubt: the first must go to Ellen. He writes:

"I received two copies of *Congressional Government* last evening and immediately reversed the wrappers about one of them and sent it off to you—in hopes that you

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, December 2, 1884.

would get it before Sunday. I took time only to write your name upon the fly-leaf: but that cost some ten minutes, because it was so hard to decide what to write! Of course, however, I had to refrain from putting anything more than I did put. I had to say everything or nothing—and what I wanted to put would have been out of place on the public face of a book. I *wanted* to say that everything in the book was yours already, having been written in the light and under the inspiration of your love; that every word of it was written as if to you, with thoughts of what you would think of it, and speculations as to your delight should it receive favour from the publishers and the public; that, as your love runs through this my first book, so it must be the enabling power in all that I may write hereafter, for without your entire love and faith and sympathy it must be also the *last* book into which I could put any of *myself*; that, in presenting it to you, I was presenting it to one whose praise and approval are a thousand times sweeter and more essential to me than the praise and approval of the whole world of critics and readers. In sending you my first book, darling, I renew the gift of myself.”<sup>1</sup>

He had kept the dedication of the book a complete secret. It was to his father:

TO  
HIS FATHER,  
THE PATIENT GUIDE OF HIS YOUTH,  
THE GRACIOUS COMPANION OF HIS MANHOOD,  
HIS BEST INSTRUCTOR AND MOST LENIENT CRITIC,  
THIS BOOK  
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED  
BY  
THE AUTHOR.

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<sup>1</sup>January 24, 1885.

He sends it on with his love and awaits eagerly the reply:

Wilmington, Friday, Jan. 30, 85

MY PRECIOUS SON—

Your book has been received and gloated over. The "dedication" took me by surprise, and never have I felt such a blow of love. Shall I confess it?—I wept and sobbed in the stir of the glad pain. God bless you, my noble child, for such a token of your affection.

I cannot write you at length touching the contents of the volume which is so dear to my pride. I have read portions of it, more than once, with an ever-new admiration. You have cause for thankfulness and for courage.

The love we all feel for you is as large as possible.

Your own affc—

FATHER

He has also that delicious experience of the young author, nervously, and quite anonymously, slipping into a bookstore to purchase a copy of his own book:

"I had a comical experience, by the way, in my attempt to make the purchase. The first clerk I approached did not know of the book and asked me 'if I remembered who it was by'! I simulated an air of difficult recollection and told him that it was written by a man named Wilson. He inquired of an elderly gentleman about Wilson's *Congressional Government* and was told that all the copies had been sold but that more had been ordered."<sup>1</sup>

And then the reviews! The rushes of hope, the moments of dejection, the hot anger, the deep gratitude, when the reviews come in. It is noteworthy that the very first review he received was one written by a man who was in after years to play a great part in his career—Walter H. Page—in the Charlotte, North Carolina, *Chronicle* for January 20, 1885. He is delighted also with the "un-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 26, 1885.



qualified praise" of his former law partner at Atlanta, Renick; and Robert Bridges, his dearest friend, writes that Garrison of the *Nation* is greatly interested in the book and will have it reviewed by Gamaliel Bradford of Boston. What joy! Of all men Bradford is the best possible, and of all journals the *Nation* is the most valuable. He writes to Ellen on February 7th:

"Now isn't that jolly! Gamaliel Bradford is the man who is most interested in just the subjects my book discusses—the man I should myself have chosen for critic—and I am assured of appreciative notice in the *Nation*. I sent Mr. Bradford a copy of my *Overland* article last winter, and received, in reply, a long and exceedingly complimentary letter from him. Truly the fates seem propitious to me nowadays!"

Bradford's great review appears in the *Nation* on February 12, 1885—and starts out with sentences which must have satisfied the most ambitious of young authors:

"We have no hesitation in saying that this is one of the most important books, dealing with political subjects, which have ever issued from the American press. We have often been asked by students of politics and by foreign visitors for some book which would explain the real working of our Government, and have been obliged to confess that there was none in existence. Of those which explain the origin of the Constitution, the intentions of its framers, and the meaning of its provisions, the name is legion; but of what the Government established by it has actually become after a century of history, if there is any expositor it has escaped our search. . . . This want Mr. Wilson has come forward to supply. His book is evidently modelled on Mr. Bagehot's *English Constitution*, and it will, though the praise is so high as to be almost extravagant, bear comparison with that inestimable work."

But the triumph of the book—and a real triumph it is, the first edition being sold out within a few weeks—is marred by “slighting” comments, such as any strong or original book is bound to provoke. He delights in Albert Shaw’s review, but the comments in the *Independent* and the *Sun* are critical, and “a sneering review” of the book “in a small local sheet of no circulation” cuts him to the raw and sends him tramping the streets to work off his bitterness. He is as proud and sensitive as he is ambitious.

The book opened a new field of constructive criticism: it was the forerunner of much thinking and writing on the political institutions of America. James Bryce read it with enthusiasm and quoted from it in *The American Commonwealth*. It was later translated into several foreign languages and had (by 1926) run through twenty-nine editions. It made such an impression upon an officer in the United States Navy<sup>1</sup> that he placed a copy in every ship of the navy: and in 1892 it won for Wilson the John Marshall prize given by Johns Hopkins University. Judged by any standard, it was a remarkable achievement, all the more amazing because it was written by a university student of twenty-eight who carried forward its production in addition to all the work of his courses. It made Wilson at once a marked man. He began getting offers of college places; he was asked by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. to write another book. He attracted the attention of some of the leading writers on political science in the nation. In April, the great Gamaliel Bradford himself travelled to Baltimore to see the young author. What an adventure was that! What great talk—all day long! He wrote, on April 16th:

“I ought in conscience—and I must as a gratification of my own feelings—make this letter a tribute to Mr.

<sup>1</sup>Rear-Admiral F. E. Chadwick.

Bradford. I have spent most of the day with him—so much of it, indeed, that I am afraid that this letter will be late in getting to you—and I have enjoyed him more than I should have enjoyed an old friend. I felt as if I had seen him before because he resembles Dr. Lefevre so much. He is like a larger, fuller, more robust image of the doctor. But the good things are *inside* him. He is natural, he is earnest to the pitch of enthusiasm in things worth thought, he is full of knowledge *and* full of affairs, he is cordial,—he is delightful. His nephew, who is with him, evidently has the warmest affection for him—and one can see *why* he has. His sympathy and his power to stimulate thought have done me as much good as a week's vacation! I feel that I've gained a friend worth having and that I have had my thinking apparatus loosened and lubricated again just as it was in peril of growing rusty. I have met a *man*, and I am excited over the event.”<sup>1</sup>

We have also a glimpse of the joy of those early triumphs in a letter written years afterward to Gamaliel Bradford's son Gamaliel by Mrs. Wilson:

“You must know that a certain almost sentimental interest clings to your very name for me because of the extreme joy which I derived from reading your father's review of *Congressional Government*! It was the first important recognition of his work from a high authority, and the praise was *so* generous yet discriminating! It was in truth an epoch in the lives of two young people, and I for one could scarcely sleep for happiness because of it. We were engaged at the time; he was a fellow at the Johns Hopkins and I was working at the Art Students' League in New York.”<sup>2</sup>

Considerable space has been given to *Congressional*

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson.

<sup>2</sup>Letter of August, 1912. Published through the kindness of Gamaliel Bradford, of Wellesley, Massachusetts.

*Government*, for it, with the two articles which led up to it, and a later book, *Constitutional Government in the United States*, published in 1908—just when he was beginning to be talked about as a possible political leader—represents the backbone of Wilson's political thinking.

The book was thus a virile departure from the ordinary commentaries of that time in that the writer considered not how to strait-jacket life to fit a constitution, even though it bore the laurels of a great tradition, but how to make that constitution fit life as it was lived in America after a century of experience as a nation. He discussed the actual working of the checks and balances of our system, considered the fumbling mechanism of congressional committees, exhibited the futility of the executive in actual leadership, and made a powerful plea for a better coördination of governmental agencies and a greater unity of control. He applied the same tests of practical good sense to the public business that are applied to private business. Does the system work? Can it make a policy and adhere to it? Can responsibility for mismanagement be fixed?

What he wants is not the letter of the law but the veritable spirit of it. He is not a radical, demanding revolutionary changes in institutions, but a critic asking his nation to return to the intent of the Constitution, which was true self-government. In that effort he is not afraid to criticize the Constitution:

"The Constitution," he says, "is not honoured by blind worship. The more open-eyed we become, as a nation, to its defects, and the prompter we grow in applying with the unhesitating courage of conviction all thoroughly-tested or well-considered expedients necessary to make self-government among us a straightforward thing of simple method, single, unstinted power, and clear responsibility, the nearer will we approach to the sound



sense and practical genius of the great and honourable statesmen of 1787.”<sup>1</sup>

Woodrow Wilson resembled Thomas Jefferson in coming to great power with a clearly defined point of view in politics. He expressed many of his conclusions in this book; and he broke long-cherished precedents, as when he appeared in person to deliver his addresses before Congress, in attempts to apply his convictions to practical affairs. If the machine had possessed the elasticity, he might have become a kind of Premier-President! In the end, it is scarcely too much to say, he fell a victim to the defects he had so clearly perceived. For want of a unified and responsible leadership, especially in the direction of foreign affairs, the nation flounders to-day in a morass of uncertainty, it is the prey of obscurantist factions, it can speak with no clarity of national purpose.

#### IX. POLITICAL ROOTAGES AND AMBITIONS

The publication of *Congressional Government* was the first fruit of Wilson's purpose in making his power felt in politics “through literary and non-partisan agencies.” He feels now that he is really beginning to carry out the terms of his “solemn covenant” with Charles Talcott, and yet he is strangely not satisfied. He had said indeed when he left Atlanta that “occupancy of office” had never been an essential part of his political programme, and *Congressional Government* had made an immediate and brilliant success, but he is suffering a storm of doubt. “Most men of my age and in the earliest, most critical stages of their careers would be willing to pay any price for such a notice from such a paper as the *Nation*; and would enjoy very keenly such congratulations as it has brought me.”<sup>2</sup> But the very first exhilarating taste of vic-

<sup>1</sup>P. 332.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, February 15, 1885.

tory, the sense of power and opportunity in the larger world which such a success brings him, plunges him into a welter of impatience with the suffocating atmosphere in which he lives—of books, not of men. He sees so vividly the need of leadership in America—so much to be done, so few men with any vision or power to do it. The Presidential campaign of 1884 is beginning to shape itself. Arthur has been, in his view, a hopeless failure in the Presidency—and a still worse leader, because an abler, James G. Blaine, seems to have a strangle hold upon the political destiny of the nation. Wilson, the student, looks out upon the barren hopelessness of American political life with a kind of rage of despair. No doubt he feels exactly as Gamaliel Bradford did when he wrote the review of Wilson's book:

"We believe, with Mr. Wilson, that the present state of things is too intolerable to last . . . and we are looking anxiously for some statesman with mind enough and courage enough to see that in a resolute advocacy of such a proposition lies the broadest and most open road to the Presidency."

All these things revive again his old and passionate desire for a more direct contact with politics. He has been experiencing the much-desired "advantages and delights of study," and he has succeeded astonishingly, but he longs for something more. "When I meet you in the Senate!" He feels sharply that he is "shut out from realizing" his first ambition, to become a public servant and actively participate in the direction of affairs. When Ellen Axson anxiously probes the deeper springs of his discontent, he opens his soul to her in a remarkable letter written February 24, 1885:

"Yes . . . there is, and has long been, in my mind a 'lurking sense of disappointment and loss, as if I had missed from my life something upon which both my gifts and in-

clinations gave me a claim'; I do feel a very real regret that I have been shut out from my heart's *first*—primary—ambition and purpose, which was, to take an active, if possible a leading, part in public life, and strike out for myself, if I had the ability, a *statesman's* career. That is my heart's,—or, rather, my *mind's*—deepest secret. . . . But don't mistake the feeling for more than it is. It is nothing *more* than a regret; and the more I study the conditions of public service in this country the less *personal* does the regret become. My disappointment is in the fact that there is no room for such a career in this country for *anybody*, rather than in the fact that there is no chance for *me*. Had I had independent means of support, even of the most modest proportions, I should doubtless have sought an entrance into politics *anyhow*, and have tried to fight my way to predominant influence even amidst the hurly-burly and helter-skelter of Congress. I have a strong instinct of leadership, an unmistakably oratorical temperament, and the keenest possible delight in affairs; and it has required very constant and stringent schooling to content me with the sober methods of the scholar and the man of letters. I have no patience for the tedious toil of what is known as 'research'; I have a passion for interpreting great thoughts to the world; I should be complete if I could inspire a great movement of opinion, if I could read the experiences of the past into the practical life of the men of to-day and so communicate the thought to the minds of the great mass of the people as to impel them to great political achievements. Burke was a *very* much greater man than Cobden or Bright; but the work of Cobden and Bright is much nearer to the measure of my powers, it seems to me, than the writing of imperishable thoughts upon the greatest problems of politics, which was Burke's mission. I think with you . . . that 'of all the world's workers those which take by far the highest rank

are the writers of noble books.' If one could choose between the two careers, *with the assurance that he had the capacity for either*, 'it seems to *me* there would be no room for hesitation even.' But my feeling has been that such literary talents as I have are *secondary* to my equipment for other things: that my power to write was meant to be a handmaiden to my power to speak and to organize action. Of course it is quite possible that I have been all along entirely misled in this view: I am ready to accept the providential ordering of my life as conclusive on that point. Certainly I have taken the course which will, with God's favour, enable me to realize *most* of what I at first proposed to myself, and I do not in the least repine at the necessity which has shut me out from all other courses of life. It is for this reason that I have never made these confessions so fully before: I did not want even to *seem* to be discontented with my lot in life. I shall write with no less diligence of preparation, both moral and mental, and with no less effort to put all that is best of myself into my books because I have had to give up a cherished ambition to be an actor in the affairs about which only my *pen* can now be busy. The new *channels* of work shall not clog my enthusiasm, and nothing shall lower my ideals or make a pause in my effort to realize them! One thing there is which I have now that I did not have when I dreamed and planned about a career as statesman and orator; one thing that I had no conception of then, and which is more to me than the strength and inspiration of *any* ambition:—that one priceless, inestimable thing is *your love*. . . ."

He thus accepts the secondary course. He yields to the ancient human compulsions. He is poor, he must live. He is in love, he must marry. He begins a long and indeed brilliant service as educator, writer, and lecturer on history and politics, all in the main line of the purpose of



his covenant with Charles Talcott, but by means of "literary and non-partisan agencies," which were never to satisfy him wholly. But he resolves greatly that if he himself cannot lead directly he will inspire his students with passion for public service, and he continues for twenty-five years in this "secondary" course, working prodigiously as a student of government and politics and history, lecturing and writing, schooling his notable gifts of leadership in the lesser politics of university life—struggling to make over the college he loves in the light of the vision he has—awaiting blindly the opportunity of returning to the primary and truly "vital purpose of his whole being" in the New Jersey campaign of 1910. He had, indeed, great talents as a writer and an educator; he had genius as a statesman.

But if he could hold himself down with stern determination to a secondary course, he could not avoid, nor did he desire to avoid, a profound interest in the great political drama of the time—the struggle between Cleveland and Blaine. While his sympathies, as between the two, were wholly with Cleveland, he distrusted profoundly both of the old parties, the hackneyed ideas, the outworn slogans. He found no really clear thinking in either camp, nor the greatest issues truly defined, and like so many ardent young men, he dreamed of a new party which would bring together the liberal-minded and thoughtful people of the country. He had glimpses of the campaign in the summer of 1884 while at home in Wilmington, and his first sharp impression of the "political mass"—"the people"—is somewhat discouraging. He stood in the rain to hear an address by Governor Jarvis, whom he greatly admired:

"The principal draw-back was the audience, which was big and dull. It applauded the stock sentiments, and let most that was *fresh* as well as eloquent go without any

manifestation of approval. It cheered the name of Gov. Cleveland, but let the great principles which his name represents pass without any show of a cordial greeting. In other words, it was not an *intelligent* audience: and Governor Jarvis therefore deserved the greater credit for preferring to dwell on arguments which were worthy to be applauded rather than upon sentiments which were sure of applause, besides showing himself well trained for his task by compelling a hearing to be given to the least entertaining sides of the questions at issue."<sup>1</sup>

As the campaign advanced he grew more and more devoted to Cleveland and his campaign. He saw only misfortune for the country if Blaine was elected. He wrote a few days before the election:

"We have been reading the *Times* and *Herald* of this morning and canvassing all the possibilities of next Tuesday. I am exceedingly hopeful, though so anxious as to be thankful that there is to be only a day or two more of suspense. Only my profound trust in an over-ruling Providence will keep me from the deepest despondency . . . if Cleveland should be defeated. God only knows what will be our political destiny if the Republican machine should triumph again!"<sup>2</sup>

On the day after election he wrote:

"But all the indications point to Cleveland's election and I hear no *claims* of success for Blaine. It *seems* as if our hopes were abundantly realized, my darling, our prayers for the country answered. If so, a great cloud is lifted from my heart and I can turn to my work with unanxious zest."<sup>3</sup>

When Cleveland was inaugurated in March, 1885, the first Democratic President in twenty-four years, Wilson

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, August 7, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, November 2, 1884.

<sup>3</sup>November 5, 1884.

did not take the journey of an hour to Washington to see the ceremony. He wrote on March 4th:

"... I did not 'run down' to Washington to-day, though nearly the whole University has gone down, including all the men (4) from this house except solemn little Dr. Caldwell and myself. I wanted to go very much, of course, but I could spare neither the time nor the money."

But he followed Cleveland's work eagerly and closely and with many expressions of approval. He wrote in April:

"... Cleveland is certainly acquitting himself most creditably in the matter of appointments. Phelps is, I feel quite sure, just the man for the English mission—though scarcely the man, as far as I can make out, for anything else. He is not the active citizen, whom I admire, but the *passive* citizen whom I have small affection for—save as a pattern of culture and integrity, as a courtly gentleman. But I have not quite made him out yet. His fault, apparently, is not that he was not widely known, but that he has never cared to exert himself to make his talents widely useful; a political *dilettante*.

"It is impossible to say *what* the effect of Pearson's renomination will be—or whether it will have *any* considerable political consequence. The dismemberment of the Democratic party is a consummation devoutly to be wished, and, if this appointment, which must delight every true advocate of civil service reform, every wisher for good government, is to have any influence, let us pray that it may effect that dismemberment. Then my November hopes, for the rise of a new party to which one could belong with self-respect and enthusiasm, might be realized."<sup>1</sup>

His interest here and always afterward was in the broader and more fundamental issues and policies, and upon

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, April 2, 1885.

these, though he was not to take an active part in political life for a quarter of a century, he was steadily thinking.

#### X. ASPIRATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Wilson's record at Johns Hopkins was one of extraordinary brilliance. Everything he touched succeeded. He had made an unusual reputation as an orator, he had written and published an original and notable book, his papers before the Seminary had been the ablest presented there. At the end of his first year he was offered voluntarily one of the two fellowships in his department for which he had applied in vain the year before:

"President Gilman told me just before I left, as I was bidding him good-bye, that I was to be offered a fellowship for next year. A fellowship carries with it a stipend of \$500.00, besides various valuable privileges. . . . I have the additional satisfaction of knowing that I was picked out by both the faculty and the students of our Seminary as having full title to the appointment. All of which goes to prove, however, that I was the least unworthy, not the most worthy. Complete success, such as I have had at the Hopkins, has the odd effect upon me of humiliating rather than exalting me: for I can't help knowing how much less worthy and capable I am than I am thought to be. I am not so clever at deceiving myself as I am at deceiving college companions. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Already he was beginning to have college positions offered to him. Professor G. Stanley Hall, then at Johns Hopkins, was so impressed with young Wilson and his brilliant essays on government that he asked him to assist the following year in logic and psychology. Wilson assured him that his "only qualifications were a sound understanding and no knowledge."<sup>2</sup> "It was like a meta-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, May 28, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, June 3, 1884.



physician to find a promising assistant in the author of three essays on Congressional govt!"<sup>1</sup>

There was also an opening at Arkansas University and a little later there were chances at Tulane, Michigan University, and Bryn Mawr.

For a time, Wilson was doubtful about returning to Hopkins for a second year, even though he had been awarded a fellowship. He was hotly impatient to be at his work in the world—eager, moreover, to be married. "I have never yet been of any use to anyone: I have yet to become a breadwinner. . . ."<sup>2</sup> He could finish his book and carry on the studies he most desired, he argued, as well outside the university as inside. A degree? What did he care for a degree? Here it was that Ellen Axson held him steady. She insisted that he return the next year. She urged him to complete his work.

He finally decided to return, but the degree he baulked at. He hated to do the necessary cramming; thought it would interfere with his real interests and enthusiasms, perhaps halt the work on his book. What was a doctor's degree, anyway! He wrote his father for advice—"sixteen pages . . . on the *pros.* and *cons.* of cramming," and was delighted with the response he received:

"As for the degree . . . father advises me not to try for it: and, since his advice coincides with my own coolest judgment in the matter, I have concluded to make no special effort in reading for it. . . . I am quite sure that I shall profit much more substantially from a line of reading of my own choosing, in the lines of my own original work, than I should from much of the reading necessary in the Ph. D. course—though my *inclinations* will take me through the most important topics of that course. The difference will be that I will read, *outside* of the pro-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, June 3, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, May 17, 1884.

scribed lines, a great deal that will be of infinitely more service to me than the volumes of another sort which I should perfunctorily peruse, to the mortification of my own tastes and desires, were I to goad myself to the tasks heaped upon the degree candidate. Do you approve? You certainly have a right to be consulted, because it is probable that a degree would render me a little more *marketable* next June than I shall otherwise be. That is the only fact that has made me hesitate about my determination in the matter. On the ground of mental and physical health there is but one side to the question. Both would be jeopardized by a forced march through fourteen thousand pages of dry reading. But I must put myself up to the highest bidder at the end of this collegiate year: and it is probable that I would fetch a bigger price with a Ph. D. label on me than I can fetch without. It's a choice, apparently, between pecuniary profit and mental advantage. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Later he wrote:

"I sacrifice a great deal in giving up the degree, but I am as sure that I am right in doing so as I would be in guarding my lungs against the consumption. . . . My friends utter all sorts of protests against my decision: but I know what I am about."<sup>2</sup>

He was too much interested in the reality of knowledge and power to be lured aside by the symbols of it. He quit the university, indeed, without the degree, but the following year, upon the urging of his wife and of Dean Thomas of Bryn Mawr, he submitted his published book, *Congressional Government*, as his thesis, took the examinations, and became a Johns Hopkins doctor of philosophy. He was of the sort who could not escape the doctorate if he tried!

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 8, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, February 20, 1885.

He worried much about where he could find a "college place" after quitting Johns Hopkins. He need not have done so. Places fall to such men. Bryn Mawr college was just being organized and its leaders were anxious to secure the "outstanding young men of the country" to organize its various departments. No one apparently at Johns Hopkins thought of anyone but Wilson to fill such a place:

"Just before lecture, Dr. Adams came to me and asked me if I wouldn't come into his office a moment and 'meet some persons who were interested in me and in historical work.' I went; and was introduced to Miss Carey Thomas and Dr. Rhoads. Miss Thomas is a daughter of one of the Hopkins trustees, is a graduate (a Ph. D.), I understand, of a German University, and is head, or 'Dean,' of the faculty of Bryn Mawr college, of which Dr. Rhoads, a prominent '*Friend*' of Philadelphia, is a trustee. You never heard of Bryn Mawr college? Well, neither did I until a very few weeks ago. The fact is that Bryn Mawr college has not been started yet. A wealthy '*Friend*' of Phila., recently deceased, left \$800,000 for the establishment of an institution for the higher education of women, to be conducted under the auspices of the Society of Friends—or at least under the direction of certain members of that Society whom he named as executors and trustees—but to be non-denominational in its teachings and government. . . . They are of course choosing their teachers with great care because each teacher chosen will, of course, have to lay the foundations of his, or her, department—will have to *organize* it, and give it direction and plan. You understand, then, the object of the introduction in Dr. Adams' office. Bryn Mawr is to have a department of history and the Dean and trustees are in search of some one fit to organize it."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 27, 1884.

Out of this first meeting was to grow Wilson's relationship with Bryn Mawr College where he was to serve for three years.

#### XI. MARRIAGE

Woodrow Wilson and Ellen Louise Axson were married in the Manse of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Savannah on June 24, 1885. Wilson had completed his work at Johns Hopkins, and Ellen Axson had returned from her art studies in New York. The dignified old Manse, which still stands among its trees behind the famous church where the music of "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" was composed and first sung, had been her home—all the home she had had—since her father's death in the previous year. She had come to live with her grandfather, the Reverend I. S. K. Axson, who was the minister of the church.

All the Wilsons, the Axsons, the Hoyts, the Howes, and some of the Woodrows were there. It was an evening wedding. The bride and groom stood in the corner of the quaint old parlour with its high ceiling, its fireplace, its dignified furniture. It was a simple ceremony presided over by the grandfather of the bride and the father of the groom. We have a momentary glimpse of these two noble old ministers, both with tears in their eyes, facing the young people. As to the bride and groom, "a finer looking couple was never seen in Savannah."

"I remember how he and I chatted about the books in my grandfather's bookcases while we waited for the bride to come downstairs. I also remember a less idyllic circumstance, how bliss was jarred and the scent of orange blossoms temporarily annulled while two small boys, the bridegroom's nephew, Wilson Howe, and the bride's brother, Edward Axson, 'mixed it up' in a gorgeous fight over some difference in boyish opinions. The bride was



much shocked; but I caught a twinkle in the bridegroom's eye, which seemed to say, 'Let's separate them; but don't let's be in too desperate haste about it.'"<sup>1</sup>

They went for their honeymoon to a place among the hills of North Carolina which bore the idyllic name of Arden. It was a one-story bit of a cottage among the trees. It had a broad-roofed porch and vines about the windows.

"We are out of doors most of the time, walking together and reading, unless I coerce him into singing, for he has a beautiful voice."<sup>2</sup>

It had been a courtship full of impetuous intensity, not without its crises and alarms.

"Can you keep a secret?" she had said when she told her brother of her engagement, and she goes on to assure him, "He is the greatest man in the world and the best."<sup>3</sup>

And yet she told her cousin a little later that "if I had not promised him just then, it would never have happened at all." For she had found her father ill with a nervous malady of which he died not long afterward. She was overwhelmed and doubted whether she should marry at all. Wilson at Johns Hopkins, intense and passionate, was reduced to misery. "It's a matter of life and death with me."<sup>4</sup>

He on his part also had compunctions:

"Sometimes I think . . . that I have done you a very questionable service in preparing for you a life with a man of a sensitive, restless, overwrought disposition like mine! I hope that you will continue to be blind to the sacrifice you are making."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Stockton Axson, *The Private Life of President Wilson*.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Ellen Axson Wilson to Mary W. Hoyt.

<sup>3</sup>Professor Stockton Axson, *The Private Life of President Wilson*.

<sup>4</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, April 15, 1885.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, February 17, 1885.

Or he asks:

"Do you think . . . that you will have the courage to promise to 'obey' a man who will be forever insisting upon your hearing his views of the world many times every day—a man of restless, unappeasable ambition to produce something worthy of the world's reading, and bent, meantime, upon compelling you to hear and pass judgment upon what he does in the progress of the adventure?"<sup>1</sup>

There have been long discussions of her own work as an artist—a "woman's right to live her own life"—and of the intense desire she had to be of "some service to the world." While an art student in New York, she had taken a class in the old Spring Street Presbyterian Church, a tenement neighbourhood of poor people, to do what she considered a "plain service to humanity."

He argued passionately with her upon this subject:

"I don't wonder that you can have no sympathy with the false talk about 'a woman's right to live her own life.'" . . .

"It is not peculiar to women, my darling, 'to fail to find contentment in living for themselves.' Men are quite as unable to satisfy themselves with self-service. True-hearted men are quite as far as true-hearted women from craving the privilege of 'living their own lives.' They all, consciously or unconsciously, testify to the truth of Hegel's beautiful conception, that they can find their true selves only in the love and devotion of family life.

"And now, Eileen, you can see the true source of my impatience with the opinion which has served as the text for this long dissertation. It is a pernicious falsehood because it contains so much truth. Its untruth is unspoken. It lies in the implied judgment as to what woman's 'own life' should be—in intimating that she has by right

<sup>1</sup>April 22, 1884.

a *life apart*. Fortunately love asserts itself quite independently of such crude beliefs! When I come to lecture on the history of society, at Bryn Mawr, I shall make some remarks upon the principles lying at the foundation of the institution of the family which, mayhap, will be hard to forget.”<sup>1</sup>

There were still other, more practical doubts. They had almost no money!

“Now, I expect to have about \$500 in all to get married on—and, since we shall both of us have to be wanderers during the summer anyhow, why shouldn’t we wander together? Would it not be the very *best* of plans to find some quiet, unfashionable place to board, and spend July and August—or part of them—off to ourselves somewhere? At any rate, we might lose ourselves to the rest of the world for five or six weeks, and spend the rest of the time visiting our friends. . . . Having had no experience (!) in getting married, I can’t tell very clearly how much of the \$500 will remain after the ceremony; but I should think quite enough for any modest, economical plan.”<sup>2</sup>

All these doubts and hesitations are dissolved now in the honeymoon cottage at Arden. They have begun with nothing in the world but hope—and the promise of the position at Bryn Mawr, for which Wilson was to receive \$1,500 a year.

It is difficult to over-emphasize the determining importance of Wilson’s marriage. A tempestuous, sensitive, imperious, highly wrought nature, at heart lonely and repressed, it is not too much to say that he found in his wife the “polar centre” of his existence. He himself, none better, recognized his dependence, and gloried in it. In a letter to Ellen Axson, written May 15, 1885, he says:

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<sup>1</sup>March 1, 1885.

<sup>2</sup>January 29, 1885.

"Have you forgotten your own quotation from Hamerton: 'It is not by adding to our knowledge, but by understanding us, that women are our helpers'? 'The intellectual life is sometimes a fearfully solitary one. Unless he lives in a great capital'—and generally even when he *does* live in such a centre—"the man devoted to that life is more than all other men liable to suffer from isolation, to feel utterly alone. . . . Give him one friend who can understand him, who will not leave him, who will always be accessible by day and night—one friend, one kindly listener, just one, and the whole universe is changed. It is deaf and indifferent no longer, and whilst *she* listens, it seems as if all men and angels listened also, so perfectly his thought is mirrored in the light of her answering eyes.'"

Even more poignantly he makes his confession:

"It isn't pleasant or convenient to have strong passions. . . . I have the uncomfortable feeling that I am carrying a volcano about with me. My salvation is in being loved. . . .

"There surely never lived a man with whom love was a more critical matter than it is with me!"<sup>1</sup>

He can trust her utterly with all his faults, his ambitions, his hopes, his aspirations. "I am, as you have no doubt found out for yourself, an excessively proud and sensitive creature."<sup>2</sup> He is "ignorant of women," he is "shut up in his own heart," he is "too intense," he is full of the "sadness doubtless natural in a person of passionate loves and hatreds, but sadness for all that,"<sup>3</sup> he has a kind of "terrible ambition," and yet rising above it all, commanding his whole life, is a passion of idealism and aspiration, a power of concentrated effort. He has, he tells her, a "longing to do immortal work." "I want to *know*

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, December 7, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>January 4, 1884.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, August 26, 1884.



the world; to retain all my sympathy with it—even with its crudenesses.”<sup>1</sup> He will know “only the best,” strive “only for the highest”! He feels within him powerful latent gifts of leadership: he will school all of his powers and passions “for the work of establishing the principles” he believes in. He is full of the “glow and enthusiasm” of his high purpose!

All this he is—and he brings to their marriage an utter confidence: “Until you loved me I used to be tormented with ‘uneasy questionings’ about *everything* in my future: now I am *uneasy* about *nothing* in that future.” His letters, indeed, bear a thousand evidences of his dependence upon her and of her steady affection.

“You know I am naturally extremely reserved. It would be a sheer impossibility for me to confide anything concerning only myself—especially any secret of my intellect—to anyone of whose sympathy I could not be absolutely sure beforehand. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

From the very beginning she enters into his work with the complete spirit of partnership. Her letters are full of her strength and sweetness. They are beautiful, sensible letters, smiling sometimes at his intensity and seriousness, patient with his assumptions of command in matters upon which she was better able to judge than he, encouraging him when he is desponding, sharing intensely in his triumphs. She is clearly wiser in the world of living men than he—the common, homely world—with interests that are wider than his own, yet she bows to the sheer power, passion, genius of the man. She is a woman who thinks for herself:

“She told me of her religious difficulties. ‘Carlyle helped me with his doctrine of work. I thought that was the best way, to go on with your work and wait for the solution to

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 9, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*I bid.*, October 30, 1883.

come. I think now that it was a poor way. You can let things alone too long. If you have the courage to take the question up you can find the way. I had always supposed I was not intelligent enough to read Kant and Hegel. But they are quite comprehensible.' Then she told me a great deal about her reading on that line and of the happiness it had brought to her. We had a great deal of conversation at that time about Hegel, Campbell's 'The Atonement'—all of the books to which she had led me."<sup>1</sup>

At another time she tells her cousin:

"I have learned one thing. You try and try with all the strength that is in you to help a person and you can't. Suddenly you find that you can help in your weakness as you can't in your strength. Woodrow had been so far from well, so discouraged and despondent. I had tried and tried to give no sign of weakness, to be strong to help him. I seemed to have lost all the power. Then I was all weakness and that helped him as nothing else could have done. He has been wonderful. He has dropped everything and bent every energy to help me. And it has brought him up out of all his own gloom. He seems really to have improved physically."

The very essence of her spirit is in this observation, also to Miss Hoyt:

"I wonder how anyone who reaches middle age can bear it if she cannot feel on looking back that, whatever mistakes she may have made, she has on the whole lived for others and not for herself. I cannot see how those who believe that life is only for development of the self can look at their past years when they get older and have a more sober point of view."

With such a companion, reinforced by her strength, steadiness, wisdom, Wilson was ready to face the world.

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<sup>1</sup>Memorandum made by Florence Hoyt, her cousin and intimate friend, about a period "at the little house in Princeton, when I was convalescing there."

The anxiety, the self-questioning, the fierce extremes of feeling of the Johns Hopkins period were now for a time to be calmed in the rich home life at Bryn Mawr and the labour and joy of the new work. To be calmed for a time only! For these intensities and passions were of the essence of the man's character.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE EDUCATOR

We live in an age disturbed, confused, bewildered, afraid of its own forces, in search not merely of its road but even of its direction. There are many voices of counsel, but few voices of vision; there is much excitement and feverish activity, but little concert of thoughtful purpose. We are distressed by our own ungoverned, undirected energies and do many things, but nothing long. It is our duty to find ourselves. It is our privilege to be calm and know that the truth has not changed, that old wisdom is more to be desired than any new nostrum, that we must neither run with the crowd nor deride it, but seek sober counsel for it and for ourselves.

*Baccalaureate Address, June 9, 1907.*

MOST of the earlier biographical writings concerning Wilson have brushed aside all too cavalierly the scholastic period of his life. "A school teacher's existence is not . . . a thrilling story . . . years of delightful living, of cultured and genial companionship."<sup>1</sup> All this may possibly be true of the average college professor, although one who has lived next door to a college may well doubt it; it was not true of the passionate, ambitious, aspiring soul of Woodrow Wilson. To treat the most important quarter century of the man's life—from the age of twenty-nine to the age of fifty-four—as though it were merely genial, uneventful, and delightful, is to misunderstand it wholly. It was rather a period of intense and well-aimed activity, a conscious struggle for the mastery of every intellectual tool, a daily practice of self-discipline. Little of this may have appeared outwardly—the man was incurably shy—

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<sup>1</sup>William Bayard Hale, *Woodrow Wilson*, p. 96.



but it is all set forth with complete clarity in his intimate letters: and the narrative of these years, if not "thrilling" in the customary implications, has an interest, a fascination, absolutely absorbing, for it concerns one of the commonest, yet profoundest, struggles of the human spirit—the effort by a man, in this case a man of extraordinary gifts and of unusual clearness of sight, to fight his way through secondary successes to the full realization of the deep primary purpose of his life.

He was to show that he had extraordinary talents as an educator, as a writer, as a lecturer, as an administrator; but the real genius of the man, the secret propulsive power of an ardent soul, which pointed clearly to another field, while constantly fed with preparation, was to be starved in realization. He was vastly successful as a college man, successful as an author, successful as a speaker, but as he himself once said in a flash of revelation:

"A man may be defeated by his own secondary successes."

During brief periods of this quarter century of his life he was lulled into momentary contentment by his triumphs and by the beauty and comfort of his home life, but never for long. His intimate letters reveal a soul torn with the unrest that comes of a want of complete fulfillment. He had "solemnly covenanted" with Charles Talcott to use his powers to the uttermost in the service of his fellow men. He doubted often whether he was doing it, or doing as much as he could or should. He suffered from his own balked powers of leadership, he struggled for readiness—but would the opportunity never come?

Nothing he does, we shall find, whether as educator, writer, or lecturer, is an end in itself—but always for something beyond. He writes his *History of the American People* in order, as he says, "to learn history." He lectures in New England, in Colorado, in the Middle West, "to

get acquainted with the American people." His essays are "studies in effective expression," he would learn to "command his style." He thinks of education never as an end in itself: "Princeton *for* the nation's service."

"You know that we hear a great deal of sentimental cant nowadays about cultivating our characters. God forbid that any man should spend his days thinking about his own character. . . . Your characters, gentlemen, are by-products and the minute you set yourselves to produce them you make prigs of yourselves and render yourselves useless. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

There must be an "objective outside of one's self." He must study "the way in which his faculties are to be made to fit into the world's affairs, and released for effort in a way that will bring real satisfaction."<sup>2</sup> He must struggle until he "has satisfied his heart with the highest achievement he is fit for"<sup>3</sup>—"the full realization of his powers, the true and clear perception of what it was his mind demanded for its satisfaction."<sup>4</sup>

Could there be finer statements than these of what lay deep in the man's soul? He held back, he toiled, he prepared—for a quarter of a century!—with a kind of mystic faith that "when ready, the call comes."

Many a commentator upon Wilson's life during the years from 1910 and onward, after he emerged upon the great stage of public affairs, expresses amazement at the facility of the "cloistered student" in the field of political leadership, how easily he out-generalled the most experienced bosses, dominated his party, came early to control Congress, and finally to stand forth preëminent as a world

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<sup>1</sup>Address at a Princeton dinner, December 9, 1902. *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 472-473.

<sup>2</sup>*When a Man Comes to Himself*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

leader. Amazing it would be, wholly inexplicable indeed, if it were not for the long years of intense if silent preparation, too easily brushed aside by hasty observers. Greatness is never accidental. Wilson had written half a dozen constitutions, beginning as a boy in Georgia, before he sat down to write out the Covenant of the League of Nations; he had organized and led several college parliaments before he stepped on the rostrum of the United States House of Representatives to deliver, in person, his first address. No man in America was better prepared with knowledge of every aspect of the development of representative government; and none, as we shall see, had given the current problems of the time more intense consideration or watched more critically the development of a new leadership.

Fifty-four years of his life he spent in preparation, ten in living, three in dying. At the age of fifty-four he was ready for that "full realization of his powers" of which he had dreamed. He came to his new responsibilities with an extraordinary release of all his capacities, both intellectual and physical. He had known the burden of a frail body; he had broken down repeatedly; he had lost in part the sight of one eye. Dr. Weir Mitchell predicted that he could not last out a single term in the Presidency. He lasted out two terms and underwent such a burden of labour as few public men have ever had to perform—the Great War and the Peace that followed it. In spite of overwhelming labour, and pain, and domestic sorrow, in spite of misunderstanding and vilification and failure, the sense of maladjustment and doubt—one of the worst evils man can know—wholly disappeared.

Possessed of these keys to this character, we can approach with clear understanding the truly absorbing narrative of his years as a college professor and president—the eager, intense, active years of his preparation. We

shall know, as he did not, the meaning of each step; we shall see him often blindly feeling out his way; we shall understand his deep discouragements, his momentary satisfactions, and how, "treating success and failure just the same," he never lost sight of his star.



## CHAPTER X

### BRYN MAWR

1885-1888

Here lies the world before you. You go out into it an enlightened spirit. What do you mean to seek; what do you expect to find?

*Baccalaureate Address, June 11, 1905.*

A man finds himself only when he finds his relation to the world.

*Address before the student body of the General Theological Seminary, April 6, 1910.*

... there is no discipline in information. Some of the best informed men I ever met could not reason at all. You know what you mean by an extraordinarily well informed man. You mean a man who always has some fact at his command to trip you up; and you will generally find that all this man can do is to throw little chunks of fact in the way so you will stumble on them and make yourself ridiculous. And if you say, "Very well, please be kind enough to generalize on this matter," you will find he cannot do it. Information is not education. Information is the raw material of education, but it is not education.

*Address of January 9, 1909.*

#### I. WILSON BECOMES A PROFESSOR

**I**N SEPTEMBER, 1885, Woodrow Wilson went with his bride to Bryn Mawr to begin his career as a college professor.

It was the opening year of a truly remarkable institution. Founded by a Quaker, it was the first college in America, indeed in the world, to offer to women opportunities for graduate education at all comparable to the courses for men in the German universities or at Johns Hopkins. Two of its leaders were trustees of Johns Hopkins, and its dean, M. Carey Thomas, the genius of its beginnings, a doctor of Zurich saturated with the German

method, was the daughter of one of them. The institution was indeed called "Jane" Hopkins or "Johanna" Hopkins and by right of direct lineage could claim quite as rationally to be a "granddaughter of Leipsic and Jena."

The college was located upon an old farm among rolling hills and picturesque woodlands ten miles northwest of Philadelphia. Two large buildings had been constructed: one, Taylor Hall, containing the administrative offices, library, and classrooms; and the other, Merion Hall, the dormitory for the students. Three small wooden houses stood at the edge of the campus. One was occupied by Miss Thomas and was called the Deanery. Another, with a view across the countryside, was known as the Scenery. Woodrow Wilson and his young wife went to live upstairs in the cottage between the two, appropriately called the Betweenery. Most of the faculty roomed in these houses, and all boarded at the Betweenery. It was a somewhat isolated and primitive life: roads in winter "ankle-deep with mud," poor heating arrangements, and kerosene lamps. One might take the train to Philadelphia by walking a quarter of a mile to the station. On Sunday, the students held Quaker meeting in the chapel, and half of them used the "thees" and "thys" of the plain language. Everything was new, everything to be done. There were almost no books in the library, no apparatus in the laboratories, nothing but an extraordinary group of ardent young professors, men and women, trained in a new way and ambitious to build a unique institution—and forty-two students, five of whom were "fellows."

The president was a fine old Quaker, James E. Rhoads. He had a noble head, wore side-whiskers and an old-fashioned flaring collar. His bust in bronze now occupies an honoured place in the college chapel. The real leader was the dean. Miss Thomas was "ridiculously young"—five days younger than Woodrow Wilson—not yet

twenty-nine, a woman of powerful intellect and dominating personality. She had herself selected the faculty, and there could be no greater tribute to her acumen than the subsequent records of the men who made up that small but brilliant early group. Besides Woodrow Wilson, there were Paul Shorey, who has made a distinguished record as a classical scholar at Chicago University, Edmund B. Wilson, biologist of Columbia University, Edward Washburn Hopkins, philologist of Yale, Edward H. Keiser, chemist, Charlotte Angas Scott, mathematician. All of them had either a German university or a Johns Hopkins background—most of them had both!—and all except Woodrow Wilson were doctors of philosophy.

A few weeks after the opening of the college, a grand inauguration ceremony took place, with President Gilman up from Hopkins and the venerable and distinguished James Russell Lowell down from New England: and the new president, Dr. Rhoads, rejoiced in "a culmination and a beginning." In the audience that day, young but keen-looking, strong-willed and critical-minded, sat the future President of the United States, himself a part of it all, and by his side, girlish and shy, his bride of four months.

Great days they were, great days in educational enterprise, great in national development. In the previous fall there had been a hard-fought political campaign which had concluded with an astonishing overturn, the "plumed knight" trailing his banner, and an "unknown outsider," the first Democrat since the Civil War, Grover Cleveland, coming into power. How keenly the associate professor of history at Bryn Mawr, already a shrewd critic of American political practices, was watching all that. In another part of the country, a young man wholly unknown to fame, in sombrero and chaps, was riding a cayuse—Theodore Roosevelt on his ranch in Dakota. Another—William H.

Taft—was a humble but good-humoured assistant to the county solicitor at Cincinnati. Still another was a starving young country lawyer in the Middle West, himself only recently married—William Jennings Bryan. Not one of these young men, all about of an age, one an Easterner, two Middle Westerners, one a Southerner, knew of any of the others; each was being trained under widely different conditions in the great American tradition, all were headed—blindly enough—toward the centre of the great stage of national affairs. Roosevelt, the impetuous and precocious rough-rider, was to be the first to arrive, and Wilson, the reserved but intense student, the last.

Wilson had hesitated long before deciding to go to Bryn Mawr. His letters of 1884 and 1885 give evidence of the thought—the sometimes agonizing thought—that he gave to this important matter of a start in life. They are immensely illuminating also as to the character and quality of the man at that time. He was desperately poor; he was ardently in love; his aspirations were unbounded. Instinctively a statesman in all of his interests, he was seeking a humble opportunity as a teacher of history in a college not yet in existence.

“My chief interest is in politics, in history as it furnishes object-lessons for the present—the University professor’s chief interest is in the accurate details of history—in the precise day of the month on which Cicero cut his eye teeth—in past society for its own sake.”<sup>1</sup>

He had, at the time, little sympathy for the higher education of women: his was the chivalrous and romantic attitude of the born Southerner. And yet he could say that “the question of the higher education of women is certain to be settled in the affirmative, in this country at least, whether my sympathy be enlisted or not.”<sup>2</sup> It plainly irks

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 13, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, November 30, 1884.



him also to find that the person in authority with whom he must deal is a woman—and one no older than he. He feels that he must apologize for this aspect of the case.

“... I would not be under a woman, so far as I can learn, but my own master, under Dr. Rhoads.”<sup>1</sup>

He finds that shy little Ellen Axson is as doubtful as he about the adventure. She too is Southern and fearful of “strong-minded women.” He turns the argument with a humour that is as pointed in its personal application as it is revealing in its disclosure of his own attitude toward education:

“... I shall agree with you, that you are a ‘little goose,’ if you bemoan the fact that you don’t know as much as the Bryn Mawr girls are expected to know! What do you think of *my* case? I am to be one of their instructors, and yet I not only could not pass the entrance examinations without special preparation, but could not even be an advanced student, much less a Fellow, in my own department—because I can’t read German at sight! But that by no means indicates that I am not infinitely better educated than my pupils will be. Both you and I have what is immeasurably better than the *information* which is all that would be needed for passing Bryn Mawr, or any other college, examinations! We have the power to think, to *use* information. For my part I want to have to carry as little *information* in my head as possible—just as (to use someone else’s illustration) I want to forget the figures in the column whose *sum* and *result* I have ascertained and want to keep. I must *scan* information, must question it closely as to every essential detail, in order that I may extract its meaning; but, the meaning once mastered, the information is lumber. It is enough if I know where to find it, for corroboration, for illustration, etc. Of course one *can’t* make himself familiar with facts for such a pur-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 30, 1884.

pose without remembering some of the more essential of them: but it is sheer, barren, ignorant waste of energy to try to remember a fact *for its own sake*. It is like eating for the sake of eating.”<sup>1</sup>

He has had tentative offers from other institutions, Tulane and Michigan universities, for his book, *Congressional Government*, has made a real impression in the academic world, and he can remain at Hopkins, but at a salary upon which he cannot possibly marry. He sums up the whole matter in a letter:

“ . . . at Bryn Mawr I should probably receive a very comfortable salary (I am prepared to refuse anything less than two thousand dollars); should have more leisure than here or elsewhere for private study; should have opportunities to lecture in Philadelphia and eventually here (if Dr. Adams’s plans and promises are made in good faith); should have leisure to learn *how* to teach before seeking a more conspicuous place where the conditions of work might be less favourable; and should have plenty of *congenial* work. It is not my purpose, you know, my darling, to spend my life in teaching. It is my purpose to get a start in the literary work which cannot at first bring one in a living. I should, of course, *prefer* to teach young men—and if I find that teaching at Bryn Mawr stands in the way of my teaching afterwards in some man’s college, I shall of course withdraw. But Dr. Adams did exactly the same thing before coming here—he was first of all professor at just such an institution, Smith College in Mass.—and, besides, beggars cannot be choosers. . . . The question as to whether it will be *agreeable* or not, I leave out altogether. I could do my duty fully without fretting, provided my ultimate object is not interfered with or postponed meanwhile.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, April 27, 1885.

"I intend to call on Miss Thomas to-morrow morning for the single object of telling her just the lines in which I purpose doing my best, my special, work, and if she thinks my purposes in any degree incompatible with the work that will be expected of me at Bryn Mawr, she can prevent my appointment.

"My anxiety to do what is best in this matter has cost me both sleep and ease of mind. I have not attempted to argue away your objections: they stand with a force of their own whatever is said. I have merely desired to point out other considerations which to a certain extent—perhaps altogether—counterbalance them. And if my darling, after further consideration, continues to think that the position I have consented to seek is one which she should be sorry to have me accept, I will at once and without hesitation withdraw from the candidacy. I will not take, contrary to her choice and judgment, this first step that we shall take together!"<sup>1</sup>

He is shocked and downcast a few days later to find that the salary he is to be offered is not \$2,000, but only \$1,200. Can two live on any such starveling income? It would leave "absolutely no margin on which I could collect a small library and make our escape from B. M. in the Summers."<sup>2</sup> He is vastly cast down.

"I dined with the 'Dean' last evening and had a very interesting experience . . . she was anxious to know if I would come to Bryn Mawr if the Trustees were to offer me such and such a salary—for I had told her that I had written to Dr. Rhoads declining twelve hundred. I think that they *will* offer me more, with a prospect of an advance both in academic rank and in salary at the end of two years—and such terms would undoubtedly be better than I

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, November 30, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, December 5, 1884.

could expect to make elsewhere at present, since I am known to have had no experience in teaching and must submit to be taken *on trial* at first.”<sup>1</sup>

He is now on tenterhooks, suffers as only a man of his intense and passionate nature can suffer—“waiting . . . as a criminal might wait for the answer to his appeal for release.”<sup>2</sup>

At length, on January 13, 1885, he can write exultantly to Ellen Axson:

“ . . . I have heard from Bryn Mawr, little lady! I have been elected ‘Associate’ in History for two years at \$1,500 a year. This is the lowest rank, and men who are no older than I, but who have received their degrees and had a single year’s experience in teaching, are put in the grade above; but I have no substantial grounds for objecting to that. There will be no real subordination. ‘Associate’ means nothing. There is to be but one instructor in history and he is to be the head of the department, of course. . . . You have the first right to be consulted, and your judgment in the matter is more vital to me than anyone else’s can be. Would you be altogether satisfied to have me accept? . . . Tell me without reserve *exactly* what you think. . . .”

Can they live on any such salary? He is desperately worried about it, rails against boarding-house keepers who charge ten dollars a week for one and wonders if that means twenty dollars for two.

“I admit that, a thousand dollars being paid out for board, no margin would remain for books or for the necessary (?) journeys to Washington; but I think that enough would remain for our other necessary expenses: and I am sure that there is something that is more needful for my success than books and trips to the capital, namely, peace

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, December 6, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, January 10, 1885.



of mind. *That* will come to me, not with abundant means, but with *you!* . . .

"You talk as if a salary of \$1,500 must plunge us into positive discomfort. It *would* make me miserable to know that I had married you only to make you feel the trials of actual poverty. But the salary promised will be enough for us *to live on* for two years—and it will be enough to preclude all necessity for your turning your talents again to money-making. I should feel it as a cruel humiliation if I found that I had not relieved you from that necessity, that I had offered you a support which I was not able to give you! . . .

"I speak that which I know, and I speak it with all solemnity, knowing all that is involved, when I say that your companionship is more essential to my *ambitions* than the books I cannot yet own or the journeys I cannot take. My first need is *you*—these things come *far* behind! I shall have the privilege of ordering for the college library the books most necessary for my use in teaching: and the Phila. libraries contain all that I shall *need* for any special studies I am likely to find time to make in term-time during those first two years—and, if I wrote *Cong. Govt.* without visiting Washington, much more can I write upon the science of administration without doing so!"<sup>1</sup>

At length it is settled: they decide to make the great adventure. He writes on January 29, 1885:

"Dr. Rhoads's reply to my letter of acceptance reached me on Tuesday, and contains this very cordial opening passage: 'Thine of the 24th with its enclosure is at hand and I am truly glad thou hast decided to come to Bryn Mawr. I trust it will prove no less advantageous to thyself than to us.'"

He takes the first opportunity to visit Bryn Mawr and

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, January 22, 1885.

to interview boarding-house keepers—in all his innocence and inexperience. He writes to his fiancée:

“I had a rather amusing visit to Mrs. Hawkins’ house at Bryn Mawr, my pet: she charges enormous prices with *such* assurance. The view of the case that must comfort you, and silence your unselfish objections, is that it would cost *one* person almost as much for board there as it would cost *two*. It pleases Mrs. H. to charge ten dollars apiece for two and ‘about fifteen’ for one!”<sup>1</sup>

He hears also from his father, to whom, as always, he has written as to some oracle, for advice. He quotes his father’s Delphic response:

“‘Hasten slowly. A year or so at Bryn Mawr will be nothing lost.’”<sup>2</sup>

With these questionings and perturbations of mind, the problem is finally settled; and in the fall the young people, with scarcely a cent to their names, but ardently in love and full of aspiration, having read Browning and Wordsworth and discussed Bagehot and Burke during a good part of the summer, begin their life career together.

## II. TEACHING WOMEN

Wilson plunges at once into his work, full of the same intensity and passion that had marked his years at Johns Hopkins—but now far happier of mind. Everything was to be done: books examined, courses prepared, lectures written. A young professor “without a barrel is a slave,” he tells Robert Bridges. Those in the adjoining Deanery, looking across to his room, saw the light burning in his study through the long winter evenings.<sup>3</sup> He must lecture on ancient history in which he has had little preparation. He must teach modern history “from the fall of the West-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, February 8, 1885.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, March 21, 1885.

<sup>3</sup>President Emeritus M. Carey Thomas to the author.

ern Empire to the establishment of the Empire of Charles the Great," he must treat "the influence of leading historical characters upon contemporary events"<sup>1</sup>—the last-named subject interesting him most of all.

He worked just as hard to satisfy his small classes—in some cases at the beginning a single student only—as though the room were crowded. One of his former friends at Johns Hopkins came to visit him at Bryn Mawr during these early days and suggested that he would like to sit quietly in the back of the classroom while Wilson lectured. To this the young professor responded with evident embarrassment. His friend remarked that, being a teacher himself, he could understand his hesitation perfectly, but he felt sure that he could learn something by listening to what Mr. Wilson had to say, no matter how informal. At this Wilson seemed still more embarrassed, finally breaking out with a laugh:

"I will have to let you into a deadly secret. My entire class consists of one girl!"<sup>2</sup>

We have a vivid glimpse of what these early "one-girl" classes were like in the reminiscences of one of the first "fellows" at Bryn Mawr:

"We met for two or three hours a week during my year as fellow . . . in one of the seminary rooms in Taylor Hall. . . . It was furnished with a large library table and chairs. We sat and talked as unconventionally and unacademically as we would have done in any library or study in a private house . . . the somewhat one-sided conversations roamed over every American political question, as it concerned his special theory of congressional leadership."<sup>3</sup>

He made from the very beginning a powerful impression, not only upon his students, but upon his associates in the

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<sup>1</sup>From the college catalogue.

<sup>2</sup>Professor E. W. Bemis to the author.

<sup>3</sup>Dr. Lucy M. Salmon, of Vassar College, to the author.

faculty.<sup>1</sup> He was a "courteous Southern gentleman," a "little more formal than the others"; "his personality made itself strongly felt especially in faculty meetings." He was "the most interesting and inspiring college lecturer I ever heard," writes Mary Tremain. He was "an agreeable companion, a trifle reserved but urbane and kindly—full of dry, pleasant humour."

"I attended his lectures five hours a week . . . [I] think of him as I knew him, so suave, so well-balanced, so full of ardour and delight in his work. He always entered the classroom smiling and animated and always in a good humour. I never saw him show the slightest irritability or impatience, and he was always amusing and witty. . . . His lectures were fascinating and held me spellbound; each was an almost perfect essay in itself, well rounded and with a distinct literary style. Never have I known a mind that could reason so profoundly and so clearly, with such breadth of vision. I can see now, however, that he was a little impatient of detail, not that he did not recognize the importance of detail, but that the fundamental underlying laws and causes, whether of economic, political or social problems, fascinated him and absorbed his best energies."<sup>2</sup>

Several of those who knew him remember how upon occasion he had a kind of "infectious gaiety," he "could set the table in a roar"—and while he was working prodigiously, his life was now extremely happy.

"Yes, my dear fellow, I did indeed carry out my purpose

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<sup>1</sup>The author has talked or corresponded with most of those now living who knew Wilson at all intimately during the years at Bryn Mawr, both faculty and students, including President Emeritus Thomas, Dr. Paul Shorey, Professor E. Washburn Hopkins, Professor E. B. Wilson, Dr. Lucy M. Salmon, Miss Mary W. Hoyt, Miss Mary Tremain, Mrs. George O. Robinson (Jane M. Bancroft), Mrs. Arthur Scribner (Helen C. Annan), Mrs. F. A. Leslie (Sarah Satterthwaite), Mrs. Spalding (Effie Southworth), Mrs. A. C. Johnson (Susan Harrison), Mrs. Alba B. Johnson (Leah Goff), Miss Mary McMurtrie.

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. Arthur H. Scribner to the author.



of marrying in June and a wonderfully happy man I am for it—happier than I ever dared to hope I should be. I was desperately in need of such a companion as Mrs. W. makes to turn my thoughts away from morbid contemplation of my own frames of mind and still more morbid weighings of the value of my own thoughts. I needed to be absorbed by somebody else—and I am. My mind and heart alike expand under the new influences.

“But that’s rhapsody enough for one letter. Say what I might, you wouldn’t take my diagnosis of the case for a scientific one. I can do nothing but ask you to credit my assurance that, in any view of the matter, this is incontestable, that the *treatment* has proved absolutely successful. The treatment is, you must allow, the test of the diagnosis. . . .

“I haven’t left myself time to speak of my work here. I can say, however, that I am enjoying it, improving under it, and find the girls interested and intelligent.”<sup>1</sup>

We have several vivid glimpses of him as he looked in those days—and one excellent photograph in which he appears standing with other members of the faculty and the entire student body upon the steps of Taylor Hall. It was in the day when young ladies wore the tightest of tight-fitting basques with long rows of buttons down the front, and bustles, and extremely long skirts, and hats perched high on their heads. But what fine-looking girls they were—there in that old picture! The dean, sitting by Dr. Rhoads, looks not a whit older than the students, and Wilson, on the other side of the president, stands with a deprecatory smile on his face. He wears a coat firmly buttoned to his chin, and a long silky moustache, which he was soon to sacrifice—and explain when asked the reason: “All the young ladies seemed to set their faces against it.” Then, and later, he delighted in poking fun at his appear-

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<sup>1</sup>Woodrow Wilson to R. Heath Dabney, October 28, 1885.

ance. When he sends a photograph to a friend he remarks that "it is an excellent likeness, not one whit uglier than I was when it was taken." He is "led to sympathize with the eagle because of the prominence of the beak in my physiognomy." There was a little of the ministerial in the impression he made in those days—and no wonder, considering his ancestry.

"I am quite used to being taken for a minister. There seems to be something about the cut of my jib that leads a great many people to conclude that I am a missionary craft of some sort—though I could myself never discover what it is."<sup>1</sup>

### III. FAILS IN HIS FIRST PUBLIC SPEECH

In spite of the eager energy which he applied to the new work, in spite of the complete happiness of his married life, it was not long before his impatient and ambitious spirit began to chafe at the limitations of his surroundings. His aspirations reached the stars, and he was held in at every point. It began to be more and more irksome to him to teach women, to say nothing of being directed by a woman. For Dean Thomas, with all her brilliance and her genius, proved to be difficult to work with. Moreover, the salary he received, barely enough for two to live on, promised to fall hopelessly short when there were three. Mrs. Wilson was ill, and he must watch over her and care for her.

"He takes such care of me," she wrote, "and I who had meant to do so much for him."<sup>2</sup>

Wilson's invariable way of meeting difficulty or discouragement was with work—work. He began writing again furiously, finding solace in his own deeply loved subjects. He had had considerable encouragement from his

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson, March 11, 1884.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Ellen Axson Wilson to Mary Hoyt.

publishers in Boston, and he soon completed a brilliant essay on "Responsible Government under the Constitution" for the *Atlantic Monthly*,<sup>1</sup> in which he further developed ideas already set forth in *Congressional Government*. It showed that he had a keen eye on Grover Cleveland, whom he aptly characterized as "clear-headed, methodical, unimaginative," and he revealed vividly where his heart was by concluding with an impassioned appeal for "legislative reform."<sup>2</sup>

His imprisoned spirit longs for the great world, the heat of battle. In March, 1886, his friend Bridges tempts him over to New York to speak for the first time before a Princeton alumni gathering. He hesitates at first about going—the cost of it—and then accepts eagerly. Who knows what may come out of such contacts? Possibly a chance at Princeton! Chauncey Depew is to be there, and other notables. He can try his oratorical wings in new airs. He prepares feverishly—he overprepares—and when the time comes he makes a serious address on "The College and the Government"—always with him a favourite theme. One who was there thus described it:

"It was very carefully prepared, well written, awfully solemn, and nearly an hour long. . . . Wilson was so in earnest—he wanted so much to say what he had prepared—that he could not stop in spite of the interruptions—in spite of the men going out—he just simply went ahead to the bitter end and finished it up."<sup>2</sup>

Depew, following him, poked good-humoured fun at the deadly seriousness of the young professor. It cut him to the quick. He considered it a far worse failure than it really was, and did not recover for years from the chagrin of it. He felt that one of the possible doors of his liberation—by way of the oratory to which he had given so much labour—

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<sup>1</sup>Published April, 1886.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Henry van Dyke, in *Success*, July, 1925.

was definitely closed. It can be imagined what such a failure meant to a man of Wilson's temperament! It was the only time in his entire career that an audience laughed at him.

But the defeat only drove him to new effort. Two weeks later, he went to Washington to see his old friend and former law partner, Renick. Renick had intimated that Wilson might find a place in the Department of State, where he could have greater freedom in looking into the "inside of the government." They visited various bureau chiefs—found several who had been interested in *Congressional Government*—but no place for an impecunious young professor without so much as a single political acquaintance to give him a standing with the administration. With his head full of the great affairs of parliaments and an ambition to be the "senator from Virginia," little did he know—then!—of the fierce struggle going on for every office that paid even an unlivable salary in a new Democratic administration. One significant thing he did on this trip: he visited Congress—about which he had been writing so shrewdly for so long—for the first time:

"About two I went up to the Capitol and watched the House and the Supreme Court until time to come away to my train (the Senate was in 'Executive Session'). . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Another great event served also to occupy his mind. Here is his account of it:

"Bryn Mawr, Pa.,

"19 April, 1886

"DEAR BOBBY,

"First for a piece of news. You are being addressed by a *father*. I have a little daughter three days old. She is not here. I have not seen her. Mrs. Wilson went South, to one of her aunts in Georgia, last week—and the baby was born the day after her arrival: two or three weeks

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, April 15, 1886.



before it was expected. The birth was unquestionably hastened by the fatigues of the journey; and I have been made desperately anxious by the circumstances, as you may suppose. But the news is that both mother and baby are doing well."<sup>1</sup>

In the same letter to Bridges, he makes an appeal for his friend Renick, whom he finds "an underpaid official in the Treasury, looking quite overworked and run down." Is there not a way for him to increase his income by writing for the press?

Poor prospects at Washington! Poor prospects as a speaker in New York! And now a third member of the family must be supported upon an impossible salary—to say nothing of paying the expenses necessary for the trip to Georgia. And work at Bryn Mawr which grows more and more incompatible with his aspirations. Well, there is still one door not yet closed. He can write.

#### IV. HE VISITS BOSTON

We find Wilson seizing the opportunity of the spring vacation of 1886, while Mrs. Wilson was away, for a trip to Boston to see his friends the publishers who brought out *Congressional Government*, and the editors of the *Atlantic Monthly*, who had just printed his first article. He and Mrs. Wilson had calculated closely on the expense of the trip and had decided that it could be done. His own account of his experiences, his first visit to Boston, in daily letters to his wife, is so delightful and interpretative, that it is here included, almost in full:

"April 22, 1886. . . . The way I feel upon reaching this borough is an involuntary tribute to its fame. I feel that odd sort of excitement which I imagine the literary adventurers of Sam Johnson's time used to feel upon reaching London. After all, there *is* more history, political and

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Robert Bridges, April 19, 1886. (Margaret Wilson, born April 16, 1886.)

literary, connected with Boston and her surroundings, Cambridge and the rest, than about any other place in the country. It gives one a queer sense of elation to be here, which, I confess, I did not expect to feel. I am tempted not to make any *visits* at all, but just to go about and spy out the noted buildings and localities. If I did not have the fear of you before my eyes, I believe I should adopt that course. But you sent me here: & I must do your errands. . . .

"I am staying at the 'United States Hotel' where I am most pleasantly accommodated at \$3.00 per day—better than we calculated. . . ."

"April 23, 1886. I am now ready to account for one day's proceedings. I went first to call on D. C. Heath. He is a very pleasant, open-faced, cordial, and yet business-like gentleman of about 35 or 40 yrs. We talked over the plan for the text-book a little,<sup>1</sup> and then he took me around to the Athenæum library and introduced me to the authorities—who turned me loose in the alcoves. That settled my fate for the morning. I stayed and looked over books till 2 o'clock. Then, after dinner, I went over to Cambridge to the Harvard library, and, introducing myself to Mr. Winsor, the librarian, settled my own fate for the afternoon, until turned out at five o'clock. I haven't found any books that will be specially helpful in my work, but I've begun to get a bird's-eye view of what's been written—and how it has been written—which is quite suggestive.

"In the evening I went to the opera. . . ."

"April 24, 1886. . . . After dinner I called again *for* Mr. Scudder<sup>2</sup> (as you would say). 'He was out, but would be in within a few minutes. Wouldn't I like to see Mr. Houghton?'<sup>3</sup> I would. I was taken into a cherry-wood office and

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<sup>1</sup>*The State.*

<sup>2</sup>Horace Scudder, then one of the editors of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

<sup>3</sup>Of Houghton, Mifflin & Company.

presented to a tall, somewhat rugged, but genial, hearty gentleman of about 65 years, I should say, who insisted on my staying until Mr. Scudder should come in. Mr. Scudder came in. We three talked pleasantly. Mr. Houghton invited me and Mr. Scudder to dine with him this evening, and me to go over the Riverside Press establishment with him this afternoon. We accepted. . . . Mr. Scudder then took me and introduced me to Mr. Aldrich,<sup>1</sup> who is a Saxon in colouring, briskly executive in manner, pithy and interesting in matter. He was very cordial. We talked of Mr. Lowell,<sup>2</sup> my *Atlantic* opponent. Upon a sudden impulse I asked Mr. Aldrich for a card of introduction to him, and posted off to make a call at his office. We were very glad to see each other. I found him really delightful. He is a young lawyer of just my age (we compared ages, quite like two boys). He is son of the manager, (and, I opine, owner) of the Lowell Institute. He is full of matter of the right sort: and our hour's conversation ran off as if it were but a tenth part so long. I'll tell you the particulars of these little meetings after lunch some day—in one of the sweet days coming.

"In the evening, being too fagged out to go to Cambridge, as I had intended, I went to the *Mikado* instead; and, upon returning to the hotel, found a note from Mr. Lowell inviting me to dinner to-day: but I was already promised to Mr. Houghton, you know. . . ."

"April 25, 1886. . . . I went out to the Riverside Presses with Mr. Houghton yesterday afternoon at half past two. When we got out there, he turned me over to Mr. Mifflin, who is in charge there—a brisk, clear-voiced, hearty, well-conditioned, rather young man (say seven and thirty). Mr. M. took me through the whole establishment. . . . Of course it was all exceedingly interesting. If ever I have

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

<sup>2</sup>Abbott Lawrence Lowell, now president of Harvard University.

another book published I shall be able to follow it in imagination through all its stages. Mr. Houghton's carriage came for us a little after four o'clock and we rode about Cambridge, seeing the homes of all the literary celebrities. . . .

"This morning I walked out Commonwealth Avenue, the great fashion street (at least *one* of the great) and attended service at Dr. Duryea's church, hearing a delightful, eloquent, refreshing sermon from him. How much of my pleasure in the sermon was due to the taste left in my mouth by your letter, I could not calculate. This afternoon I am going to call on Mr. Bradford."<sup>1</sup>

"April 26, 1886. I can complete my narrative now for the next thing to do is to take the train at 6:30 this afternoon. Unless I get home (or, rather to Bryn Mawr—for it isn't 'home' so long as you are not there) to-morrow morning, and so give myself part of the day for resting, I can't have any sort of a lecture ready for Wednesday. . . .

"I got out to Mr. Bradford's (No. 8 Prescott St.—do you remember?—the address we searched for once amongst the scraps in the scrap basket, after I had prematurely torn up the letter from G. B. jr.) about four o'clock and stayed till about 10 in the evening, taking tea with the enthusiastic reformer. We did not *sit* and talk all that time, but spent most of the daylight hours walking out to Mt. Auburn (the cemetery) and taking the fine view from the tower there. The ladies of the house are his sister and his cousin. His sister was very bright and chatty; his cousin was sleepy. We talked on all sorts of topics (necessarily, to fill up five or six hours); I instructed (?) him on some points of his hobby—as well as on others; and, altogether, I made the usual blunder of talking too much—more than my share. . . .

"So now for Bryn Mawr, to meet my letters from Gainesville. . . ."

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<sup>1</sup>Gamaliel Bradford, the elder.



"April 27, 1886. Here I am again in our cosey little rooms—not at home, as I said, but constantly *reminded* of home—that is, of *you!* . . . .

"I find that the trip (five days hotel, instead of seven as we calculated) cost me *forty* dollars only, instead of seventy—quite enough, but less than I expected."

#### V. PLANS A "NOVUM ORGANON" OF POLITICS

The visit to Boston vastly stimulated and encouraged Wilson. He had met men of cultivation and distinction—gentlemen—and he felt at home among them. He spoke their language; he liked the atmosphere they lived in. He was especially delighted with Scudder, and, not long after his return to Bryn Mawr, he wrote him a long letter<sup>1</sup> outlining a plan for a stupendous work on politics and government, comprehensive beyond anything yet produced in the world. It was to be a veritable *Novum Organon* of statecraft, requiring an indefinite number of volumes. He writes to his wife—there in Gainesville, Georgia, with her baby girl:

"I last night despatched a long letter (12 pages) to Mr. Horace Scudder in Boston, laying before him with considerable fulness my literary scheme, as to Democracy and the rest, and asking his opinion and advice upon it! A very new and novel rôle for me. I never did such a thing before in my life—and probably never shall again. I don't know what put it into my head, but I have been drawn very strongly towards Mr. Scudder and crave his literary friendship. If, as I hope, he will be inclined to respond, I feel that my gain will be great. He has a keen literary instinct and a catholic literary sympathy which would make his counsels very valuable."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>May 13, 1886.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, May 13, 1886.

He apologizes to Scudder for his presumption:

"Of course the work would go on very slowly. I am teaching history and political economy—and they fill my time so that all work in my own special, chosen field is necessarily overwhelmingly handicapped. Until I can get a chair in which my professional and original work can go hand in hand the case must continue the same: and, since there are only one or two such chairs in the country, and none of them with the least thought of becoming vacant for me, I must calculate on such a continuance."

He is overjoyed by the kindly response—kindly, corrective, and cooling! He returns to the subject with an even more ardent letter in July, a glimpse of which will indicate the soaring ambition of his plans:

"I want to come at the true conception of the nature of the modern democratic state by way of an accurate exposition of the history of democratic development. I want to keep safely within sober induction from concrete examples of political organization and of realized political thought. I would read the heart of political practice, letting political theory wait on that practice and carry weight only in proportion to its nearness to what has been actually accomplished. I would trace the genesis and development of modern democratic institutions—which, so far, seem to me expressions of the adult age of the State, the organic people come to its self-possessed majority and no longer in need of the guardianship of king or aristocracy or priesthood—as Maine has traced the genesis and development of modern legal systems.

"Just as most economists have, until very lately, deduced their whole science from certain hypothetical states of fact and an analysis of certain fictitious kinds of men, so most writers on politics have—like Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, *et id omne genus*—evolved government out of primitive condition of mankind for the actual existence of

which they could adduce no sort of evidence. They adopted the method common among many novelists of a certain class—of creating collections of dissected qualities and then bringing about situations in which those qualities could put on the similitude of real persons: a method opposite to the dramatic, Shakespearean method—of setting forth words and actions, and *so* letting character emerge. As we can know persons only from what they say and do, and the manner of their acting and speaking, so we can know governments only from what *they* say and do and the manner of their speech and action. But in governments and persons alike we can look beneath the surface, if we have discernment enough, and so discover more of *character* than any amount of *a priori* speculation can reveal. I have not hit upon a very happy analogy; but you will catch my thought. It is, that the true philosophy of government can be extracted only from the true history of government.

“This is simply saying that I would apply the now common inductive method to the study of democratic government—to the study of the genesis and development of *our* democratic government in particular—; but I want to say more than that. I want that method to carry me further than it carries most of those who employ it. Men study the material universe so; and stop short at the differentiated *forms* of matter and life. Aristotle studied politics so: but did not get further than the outward differences of institutions:—did not press on beyond logical distinctions to discover the spiritual oneness of government, the life that lives *within* it. The ideal thing to do, would be to penetrate to its *essential character* by way of a thorough knowledge of all its outward manifestations of character.”<sup>1</sup>

Every true writer has a vision of “one great book” he

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Horace Scudder, July 10, 1886.

will some day write—a book into which he will put all of himself, his thoughts, his ideals. All his life long, Wilson was to dream of writing such a book as he had outlined to Scudder. A thousand necessities of life, and love, and ambition harried him—he had to administer a university, lead a state, direct the destinies of a great nation through its greatest crisis, but always he was coming back longingly and lovingly to the book of his vision. It came to have a familiar name in his family conversation: “P. o. P.”, *The Philosophy of Politics*. He told Dr. Axson that he liked better *The Spirit of the Laws*, but Montesquieu had already preëmpted that title. It is referred to in his letters and in the scraps of diary he kept. Dr. Axson remembers hearing the subject spoken of familiarly at the family table: “When father comes to the writing of P. o. P.” At first, in those ardent early days, he thought he would be ready for his great task at forty-five; when he was forty-five he looked forward to fifty. At fifty he was in a desperate struggle over the reorganization of Princeton University. Nothing done! Nothing done! In the melancholy days at the White House after the death of Mrs. Wilson, Dr. Axson was seeking to comfort him. To the lonely man there seemed nothing ahead of him in life.

“You will write that great book on the Philosophy of Politics.”

“Not a great book,” responded Wilson. “The longer I think of the subject the shorter the book I want to write.”

In the broken days after his retirement from the Presidency the old vision flared up again. He will yet write the great book! The *Novum Organon* of politics! When he closed his tired eyes, for the last time, the *magnum opus* was still unpenned.

But how he toiled in preparation for it. Toiled also that there might be more money to support his little family and buy him books and give him opportunity to travel



that he might learn more of the subjects which so delighted him.

#### VI. HE BEGINS "THE STATE"

As a first step in the great project for a *Novum Organon* of politics, Wilson felt that he must make a complete study of the methods and the history of government in all the civilized states of the world. A mighty task! He had closed an arrangement when in Boston to write a textbook—a "dull fact book"—for D. C. Heath & Company to be called *The State*, in which he proposed to put down a description of the governments of all nations. He does this not because he likes writing textbooks—in fact, he hates it—but he must know, to the scholarly depths of the subject, all there is to know about the development of the state. There are few books in English to help him—he searches the libraries of Boston and New York—so that he must learn German in order to give him access to the best studies in the world upon the subject: he must also improve his French.

At every step in all these plans he takes Mrs. Wilson fully into his confidence: she stimulates his vision, gives him courage to go forward. She now has a baby to care for, she must do all of the household work and make all of her own clothes, but she begins valiantly, with him, to study German that she may help him with his endless study of abstruse German treatises. She looked hardly more than a girl.

"I remember Mrs. Wilson as a lady of very fair hair (golden) and dark eyes, of sweet and quiet manner. The oldest daughter, Margaret, was the baby then. . . . I think of her as a person of unusual appearance . . . slightly aloof and retiring."<sup>1</sup>

We have glimpses of the young professor and his wife

<sup>1</sup>Mrs. F. A. Leslie, a fellow, 1886-1887, to the author.

during the next year or so poring over German texts, one with the dictionary, the other writing down the translations. It seemed at one time as though, in order to carry on the work, he must go directly to Germany and study there; and in spite of all the handicaps of his family and his poverty, he dreamed ardently of it. He wrote to his friend Dabney in the fall of 1886:

“I worked hard most of the summer—*all* of it after the receipt of your letter: first with a sick baby, and afterwards with a big subject—the treatise on Government which I am preparing for D. C. Heath & Co. I told you of the undertaking, didn’t, I?—the origin and early history of govt viewed historically, of course, and *not à la* Rousseau, Locke, *et al*; the govts of Greece and Rome and of the Middle Ages, treated in the same spirit; comparative studies in the public law of the present, our own and the Eng. constitutions standing centrally and most prominent, of course; and, in the light of such studies, considerations on the functions and ends of govt and on law (customary, statutory, etc.). A big task—especially in view of the condensation *and* clearness necessary to a book intended to be small enough and plain enough to be used as a college textbook; but a task full of delight and profit for me, and thoroughly well worth doing, because our language, so far as I know, affords no such work.

“Speaking of this work,—which is just now imperatively interrupted by class duties, and must probably wait to be done in vacations,—leads me to ask your counsel on what is to me a matter of the very greatest moment. I’ll set it forth as plainly and briefly as I can. In my special work in comparative Politics—indeed in *all* my work—as I need hardly tell you, I have to use *German* a great deal: I ought to use it a great deal more than I do. But, such are my engagements, and such is my position in other respects, I cannot find, either in term time or out of it, time or op-

portunity to learn the language well enough to be emancipated from the constant use of the dictionary in reading it. That's one side of my statement; now for the other. These studies in public law and the history of govt for which Heath & Co. are waiting ought to be finished,—such is *my* interest as well as the publishers'—before the time at which vacations now promise to finish them. Besides, I have another scheme on hand, for what Mr. Scudder of Cambridge (Mass.) calls a *Novum Organon* on Politics (I will lay the plan before you later if you are interested.) for the preparation of which, not only a ready knowledge of German, but considerable leisure to know, better than I can possibly know it from any outlook available in Bryn Mawr, *the modern world*.—That is the other side of my statement. Put together, the two pieces make this whole: I am just now pressingly in need of two things, German and a little leisure for wide observation of men and things. This is the best time to learn German because my acquiring faculties are still young; and this is the most desirable time at which to have leisure, because *my* susceptibility to impressions from men and things is as yet unblunted.

“Such being the case, my dear fellow, I want from you both counsel and information. Would you advise me to cut loose from employment and go abroad for one or two years? and could you estimate for me the cost of living in Berlin for a man, wife, and child who would not care a peppercorn for style, but who would require for a while, perhaps, a nurse, and always *comfort*? My plan would be to spend most of my time in Berlin, because that is the centre of German affairs, but not all of it; and not to connect myself regularly with any Univ., but to be a sort of detached student, writing, observing, digging at German, but attending regular courses only sometimes and perhaps. If prices be such as I hope they are, we might afford to stay in Europe for a couple of years. Meantime, I have

gotten a start in German; and by next June can have gotten a better one.

"What do you say, Heath? Would you advise it? I want to know your opinion, and your *whole* opinion. The leisure and the German would be invaluable to me: can I risk getting employment again when I return? Is the benefit to be expected greater or less than the risk which is inevitable? If you will answer me candidly as to your thought on these heads you will have revealed your dear, genuine old self once more to

"Your sincere friend,  
"WOODROW WILSON."<sup>1</sup>

What he wants are the realities of knowledge and of scholarship. It makes him impatient even to take the time from these eager enterprises to go to Johns Hopkins for his doctor's degree. He had thought it not worth while to bother with; but Dean Thomas at Bryn Mawr, who prided herself on having no professor in the faculty without a doctor's degree, is somewhat insistent, and his wife is now really urgent, thinking the degree indispensable to his career. In May, 1886, therefore, he went to Hopkins to take the more or less boresome but nervously exhausting examinations "to secure that petty title"<sup>2</sup> and writes two days later:

"Hurrah—a thousand times hurrah—I'm through, I'm through—the degree is actually secured! Oh, the relief of it!"<sup>3</sup>

"I won the degree *for you*. I don't care for it for myself. I *did* rejoice in writing to dear mother to-day that I was Ph. D. I saved the news as a surprise; and I know how it will gratify the dear home folks. *That* would have been well

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<sup>1</sup>November 7, 1886.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, May 27, 1886.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, May 29, 1886.



worth while anyhow! But *I won the degree for you*. I could live on \$1,500 a year very easily: and I hope that my fortunes will grow with my reputation (though that is problematical). But my spur in the struggle of preparation I have just been through was to please *you*, and to make *you* more comfortable. In so far as the degree has a commercial value, it was earned for you; in so far as it has a sentimental value, it was won for you! If there's any triumph, it is *yours*."<sup>1</sup>

#### VII. VISIONS AND AMBITIONS

One would think that a young college professor beginning his career, having to prepare all his courses, busily writing essays for magazines, planning a vast *Novum Organon* of politics, learning German, and making studies for a difficult textbook in a new field, would have his hands and his mind reasonably full. But this young man was utterly insatiable. He must indeed do all this grubbing labour of scholarship, but he must never forget the ultimate purpose he had in view—the vision that burned like a beacon in the distance. He must, at all hazards, refuse to be overwhelmed by closet studies. We have a wonderful letter written to his dear friend Talcott only a week after he unfolded his ambitious plans of a trip to Germany to his friend Dabney. Talcott, it will be remembered, was the classmate at Princeton with whom he made the “solemn covenant” of service to the nation.

“After my winter had been hurried away in the unaccustomed, and therefore arduous duties of the classroom, my summer vacation was swallowed up by work on a textbook on *Government* which I have been rash enough to undertake for D. C. Heath & Co. of Boston. But Mrs. Wilson could tell you how, meanwhile, my thoughts have constantly reverted to our old compact, of life-long coöper-

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, May 30, 1886.

ation, made at college, and to my old faith, embodied in that contract, that we could keep our friendship fresh, not a mere thing of memory and of boyish association, but a thing of ever renewed vigour and steady growth, by substituting a common cause, a common purpose of public service, for the actual social companionship which we cannot have. And, now that I have at last a little leisure for writing to you, I am going back to make some more observations and confessions to you on that old text. If you are tired of the text, I trust to your honesty to say so. Your saying so will not check any of the old love; it will only make me feel a whit lonelier in the lines of work I have chosen. For in the thinking and writing I am trying to do, I constantly feel the disadvantages of the *closet*. I want to keep close to the *practical* and the *practicable* in politics; my ambition is to add something to the *statesmanship* of the country, if that something be only thought, and not the old achievement of which I used to dream when I hoped that I might enter practical politics. I seek, therefore, in the acquaintances I make, not other 'professors,' not other *book*-politicians, but men who have direct touch of the world; in order that I may study *affairs*, rather than doctrine. But the 'practical men' I meet have not broad horizons; *they* are *not* students of affairs: they learn what they know rather by friction than by rational observation; they are at the opposite extreme from the men of books, who are all horizon,—and the one extreme is as fatal to balanced thought as the other. Now you, Charlie, are both *in* affairs and studious of them; if ever I met a fellow with whose ways of thinking I could sympathize, and from whom, consequently, I could receive aid and comfort, thou art the man,—*and I need you*. If you need me in any degree, the old compact between us is, therefore, *ipso facto* renewed.

"I believe, Charlie, that if a band of young fellows (say

ten or twelve) could get together (and by "getting together" I mean getting their *opinions* together, whether by circular correspondence or other means) upon a common platform, and, having gotten together on good solid planks with reference to the questions of the immediate future, should raise a united voice in such periodicals, great or small, as they could gain access to, gradually working their way out, by means of a real understanding of the questions they handled, to a position of prominence and acknowledged authority in the public prints, and so in the public mind, a long step would have been taken towards the formation of such a new political sentiment and party as the country stands in such pressing need of,—and I am ambitious that we should have a hand in forming such a group. All the country needs is a new and sincere body of thought in politics, coherently, distinctly, and boldly uttered by men who are sure of their ground. The power of men like Henry George seems to me to mean that; and why should not men who have sane purposes avail themselves of this thirst & enthusiasm for better, higher, more hopeful purpose in politics than either of the present, moribund parties can give?

"Now, that's the key-thought of my proposition for a partnership. If your interest and wishes run with me, we'll talk of it further and at length. Meantime believe me, exactly as of old,

"Your sincere friend

"WOODROW WILSON."<sup>1</sup>

The idea expressed in this letter, of a group of thoughtful young men getting together, refining their ideas by conversation and correspondence, and then making themselves felt in public life because they had "thought through" to sensible proposals, was to remain long in Wilson's mind.

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<sup>1</sup>November 14, 1886.

The first time that the present writer talked with Wilson, in 1910, while he was president at Princeton, Wilson advanced this idea as a practical proposal for the group of ardent young reformers who then had the ear of the public through the popular magazines. It was, he said, the way the fathers formulated their policies—Madison, Monroe, Jefferson, Adams,—by correspondence; by thorough thought and discussion before going to the public. Wilson himself tried to work out some such plan—never fruitfully.

His vision of going to Germany to study was soon wrecked upon the hard rocks of practical necessity. In the early part of 1887 Mrs. Wilson was ill again—there was to be another child—and he must work harder than ever. He arranged for a series of twenty-five lectures at Johns Hopkins that would pay him \$500; and he began writing furiously again.

In March, 1887, an essay, "Of the Study of Politics," appeared in the *New Princeton Review*. He urged his favourite idea that in order "to know anything about government, you must *see it alive*"—not merely as it appears in written constitutions and laws. He spent much labour upon this essay to make it "beautiful to read."<sup>1</sup>

We find him working also upon another favourite subject, that of administration, which finally yielded a comprehensive and thoughtful article, full of penetrating observations and finely turned epigrams.<sup>2</sup> It is surprising how many of the roots of Wilson's later convictions upon popular government and his attitude toward difficult national questions are to be found in this paper. His comments upon democratic policy, leadership in a republic, the civil service, the relationships of government to big business, and the like, are as fresh and pertinent to-day as

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<sup>1</sup>It was afterward included in the volume *An Old Master*.

<sup>2</sup>"The Study of Administration." In the *Political Science Quarterly*, June, 1887. See also *The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol I, pp. 130-158.



they were when he wrote them—because they represent fundamental thinking. He even sees with prophetic eye the inevitable trend of democratic government toward world organization. The restless scholar, teaching girls at Bryn Mawr, thus foreshadows the League of Nations which years later he was to have the principal part in bringing into existence:

“There is a tendency—is there not?—a tendency as yet dim, but already steadily impulsive and clearly destined to prevail, towards, first the confederation of parts of empires like the British, and finally of great states themselves. Instead of centralization of power, there is to be wide union with tolerated divisions of prerogative. This is a tendency towards the American type—of governments joined with governments for the pursuit of common purposes, in honorary equality and honourable subordination.”<sup>1</sup>

#### VIII. FAMILY LIFE AT BRYN MAWR

In his eagerness not only to find his place in the literary world, but to make more money—urgently needed in his small household—he tried his hand at a story and essays which he sent under a *nom de plume* to his friend Bridges, who was now an editor at *Scribner's*. But he could not write stories! He had no gift whatever in that direction and essays came back to him. He made also, in the spring of 1887, an important change in his domestic arrangements. His rooms in the crowded and noisy Betweenery, especially now that there was a little girl who would soon be running about, had become intolerable. There must be more room, and a place for children to play. Back of the college, in a deep ravine, runs the Gulph Road, along which in Revolutionary times marched Washington's army, going to Valley Forge. Down the hill some quarter of a mile stood

<sup>1</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 157-158.

a weather-beaten colonial church, curiously turreted, with the graves of ancient families about it. Back of it stretched the Vaux forest, which is still untouched, and close to that quietude the parsonage was placed.<sup>1</sup> Here the Wilsons moved in May, 1887. A letter to Bridges gives us a glimpse of the future President—no doubt putting up stovepipes, although he was always a man inept at work with his hands.

Bryn Mawr, Pa., 29 May, 1887.

MY DEAR BOBBY,

It must have seemed to you simple "bad manners" that I did not answer at once your letter of the 25th, asking me to go out on Long Island with you for to-day and to-morrow; but it was literally out of my power to do so. We have rented a cottage for next year and for the last 3 or 4 days every hour not spent in discharging class duty I have spent superintending and *doing* the work necessary to get it in shape for occupation. I haven't had a moment for thought of anything but my own household plans, and nights have found me hardly able even to *hold* a pen. It would indeed have been delightful to go with you on your "days-off"—it would have rejoiced both soul and body; but all sorts of things great and small, hold me fast here and I am obliged, physically at least, to confine myself to a very few square miles.

In spite of the disappointment it brought me, by showing me a delightful thing I could not do, I was sincerely glad to get your letter. It gave me the first authentic word I have had as to how you fare in your new berth: and I have long been hungry for news on that point. I am the gladder to get it because it's good news—of the "contentment" I hoped the new employment would bring you. I say hurrah! with all my heart!

No, you did not mislead me as to the character of article that would be likely to suit the magazine: but I haven't time to *prepare* articles of any sort: i.e. to *study for* them. I must make up what I write for magazines of the thoughts which come to me through my necessary daily contact with men and books: thoughts wh. are none the less serious and none the less carefully worked out—when I come to write them—on that

<sup>1</sup>The house is still standing and looks much as it did in 1887.

account: but not forming themselves at beck of my will into articles of any particular class. They are simply the *horizon* to my reading and study. If we had in this country a periodical of the aim of the *Fortnightly*, say, my study could be made to contribute directly to it: but to all we have it contributes only indirectly.

Mrs. Wilson sends warmest regards.

As ever

Yours affectionately

WOODROW WILSON

That summer a second daughter, Jessie Woodrow, was born to the Wilsons,<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Wilson being again with her friends at Gainesville, Georgia. It was a summer of hard work for Wilson, partly on the lectures for his Johns Hopkins course, chiefly on the German treatises in preparation for *The State*. He was indefatigable in the thoroughness of his method. An immense quantity of his notes, stenographic or written in his painstaking script, or on his typewriter, remained among his files at his death. At a time when the card catalogue method was in its infancy he employed it with great skill. He had a box of japanned tin which held cards 5 x 2 inches in size, and upon these he wrote his references, mostly in German and French, and part of his notes.<sup>2</sup> Nothing could better reveal the care with which he studied the Greek and Roman systems, as well as the later development of the modern state. He spent three years of the hardest toil on the preparation of *The State*.

As soon as the Wilsons found that they were to have a house of their own with a little extra room—though their income was still entirely insufficient—they proceeded to carry out a long-cherished plan of helping some of their young kin in the South to an education. The South was still poor, and many of the youth of fine families had the

<sup>1</sup>August 28, 1887.

<sup>2</sup>See facsimiles.

<i>Relation</i>	<i>to Morals and Religion</i>	
<i>Grail</i>		<i>Geschichte der Ethik in der neueren</i>
<i>Ch.</i>		<i>Philosophie. I. Stuttgart, 1882</i>

<i>Self-government,</i>		
<i>Liaben,</i>		<i>Civil Liberty and Self-government.</i>
<i>J.</i>		<i>Political Ethics. 2. ed., Phila., 1876.</i>

<i>Prussians.</i>		
<i>Schulze,</i>		<i>Das preussische Staatsrecht, auf Grundlage des deutschen Staatsrechts.</i>
<i>H.</i>		<i>2 vols., Leipzig, 1872-77.</i>
		<i>Das Staatsrecht des Königreichs Preussen,</i>
		<i>in <u>O. Meiermann's Handbuch</u></i>
		<i>Friburg, 1884</i>

Facsimiles of cards from a card catalogue prepared by Woodrow Wilson when writing *The State*



greatest difficulty in securing any adequate schooling. From these Bryn Mawr days onward, the Wilson household always contained one or more such students. In the fall of 1887, Mrs. Wilson's brother Edward and her cousin, Mary W. Hoyt, came to live in the house on Gulph Road, the latter to attend Bryn Mawr College. Stockton Axson was also a guest during part of the time. Mary W. Hoyt gives us a glimpse of these relationships:<sup>1</sup>

"In the spring of 1887, I received from Ellen a letter that has made all of my life different. She said that she and Cousin Woodrow were to keep house the next year, and that they wished me to live with them and to go to Bryn Mawr College! It was so like those two to think, as soon as they had anything, of sharing it!

"Cousin Woodrow met us in Philadelphia and we went to Bryn Mawr to the parsonage. The front room on the third floor was the study, and there they spent their evenings, he working, while Ellen sewed. He was working very hard: for the first time he was giving his course in Politics; he had a series of lectures at The Hopkins where he went every other week, and he was always writing all kinds of things. Once he brought me a type-written slip and said:

"'Cousin Mary, will you read this and tell me if it is clear?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'I understand it.'

"Next day he said: 'Cousin Mary, what did that paragraph you read for me yesterday say?'

"Imagine my embarrassment! Stammering, I repeated what I remembered.

"'Yes,' he said; 'that is it. If you had not understood it, I should have been obliged to write it again.'

"Cousin Woodrow was not exactly a domestic man; he

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<sup>1</sup>Mary W. Hoyt graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1893 and is now principal of the Arden School at Lakewood, New Jersey.

loved his family and enjoyed their society, but he had no gift with tools. He did what was necessary—took care of the furnace and pumped the water into the tank from a well worked by a queer little hand pump. If Ellen needed a temperamental cook dismissed, he was willing to undertake the job.

“‘Put the carving knife on the table beside me and go upstairs,’ he said.

“In general, however, he gave Ellen the money and left to her the management of household affairs. She took her duties very seriously, going into Philadelphia once a week for cooking lessons from Mrs. Rorer, feeding us on the delicious things she had learned to make. Ellen made the children’s clothes, also, and economized in every possible way. And yet there was no feeling of pressure, and the house was always ready to entertain a guest. One of the greatest events was the visit of his father, Dr. Joseph Wilson, who made Ellen very happy by his compliments. As a matter of fact, I have often wondered how they managed on his small salary.

“We were all Presbyterians attending regularly the Presbyterian Church at Bryn Mawr, and we did not work on Sunday. On Sundays, then, we had a chance to read together and to talk. And sometimes on Friday evenings, when he was too tired to work, he would read aloud or sing some college songs or some of the beautiful hymns. I have always loved ‘Art thou weary, art thou languid,’ because I can hear his voice in the ‘Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs, Answer, “Yes.”’<sup>2</sup> He read *Richard II*, I remember, *She Stoops to Conquer*, and *Obiter Dicta* which he especially liked. He admired Gladstone (whose portrait Ellen had done for him in crayon for his study wall) and Burke and Bagehot. When the Traveller’s Insurance Company brought out their complete edition of Bagehot, he advised me to buy it with a Christmas present I had just

received. He had the tenderest heart in the world and could never read aloud anything sad, because his voice would always break. He had, I think, the most beautiful speaking voice in the world.

"It must have been a monotonous life for him, I think. He walked every afternoon for an hour, generally alone. During the walk, he composed his lectures, writing them down in shorthand and transcribing them on the typewriter afterward. We went into town once or twice to dine with our uncle and aunt, Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Hoyt, but I cannot remember any other so-called diversion. I suppose if he and Ellen had had luxurious tastes, they could not have done so much for Ed and me. I have often thought how hard it was for them never to have had their home to themselves. He would have liked it very much, just with Ellen, I think; and yet I cannot express to you the loveliness of life in that home. It was filled with so much kindness and courtesy, with so much devotion between Ellen and Cousin Woodrow, that the air always seemed to have a kind of sparkle."<sup>1</sup>

#### IX. "THIRTY-ONE YEARS OLD AND NOTHING DONE"

At the beginning of his third year at Bryn Mawr, the fall of 1887, Wilson's impatience and discontent reached a climax. "Thirty-one years old and nothing done!"<sup>2</sup> It seemed to him he was suffocating in that confining atmosphere. He was scarcely making enough to live on: and his college work was increasing so that he had constantly less time to devote to his original studies. When he signed the contract to continue his work at Bryn Mawr, he had been promised an assistant to teach history so that he could devote more of his time to political science, and he had had a momentary thrill of hope that he might lure his friend Dabney to Bryn Mawr to work with him; but the college

<sup>1</sup>From a memorandum written for the author.

could not afford enough money for such an assistant to live on. And the library facilities of the new institution were too limited to give Wilson scope for his studies.

The work itself was not to his liking. Teaching women "relaxes one's mental muscle." When he made a joke they "all wrote it down solemnly in their note-books."

"Undoubtedly young women do extremely well in the literatures, Greek, Latin, and English," he told Stockton Axson, "but in my subjects they are too docile. They just sit and take it all. There is no intellectual comeback."<sup>1</sup>

One of the students who knew him best says that "he assumed that women were quite different from men, and he made, I felt, no effort to understand them."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, she thinks that "he never liked teaching, as differentiated from lecturing." She quotes Professor G. H. Palmer on the qualifications of the ideal teacher, "a capacity for vicariousness," "a willingness to be forgot"—and Woodrow Wilson, she thinks, had neither of these qualities. But as a lecturer he was a tremendous success—and lecturing after all was the essence of the "German method" which Bryn Mawr was seeking so strenuously to develop. Every student who sat under him in those years, as afterward at Wesleyan and Princeton, testifies to his genius in this respect.

"He was the most interesting and inspiring college lecturer that I ever heard. I followed his courses in American History and the Italian Renaissance, looking forward eagerly to each day's lecture. He charmed me by his vivid pictures of incidents and characters, by the smoothness of his periods and the clearness of his diction. His method was to give rapidly a description of the topic for the day with its lights and shades, its leading actors, its relation to former topics studied, its significance in relation to the

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Stockton Axson to the author.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Lucy M. Salmon of Vassar College to the author.



whole subject. Then, after arousing our keenest interest, he proceeded more slowly to emphasize the main facts and conclusions, so clearly and closely connected, so logically developed that it was impossible to misunderstand or to forget the essential matter. Though serious in intent and solidly informing, every lesson was lighted up with touches of most delightful humour. I have for years treasured the recollection of his many enlivening anecdotes and clever epigrams.

"Aside from his regular scheduled lectures, he held each fortnight an evening class for the discussion of current topics, especially those of a political nature. Though entirely voluntary, this meeting was well attended by others besides his own students. My own interest in general politics was first awakened by these informal talks. While questions were encouraged, it was clear that Mr. Wilson preferred to carry on the main discussion himself."<sup>1</sup>

Wilson himself gives a delicious glimpse of his difficulties at Bryn Mawr:

"I have just come from a long and exhausting interview with Miss —— the new Fellow in History. I dread these first interviews, and am very glad that this one is over with. Miss —— turns out to be a pleasant small person of a mind which it will be very hard, but I trust not impossible, to impress—a mind which has been pressed so often by other things at every point at which you press it that it yields in a *habitual*, acquired way rather than in the way you wish. She seems to herself, evidently, to have heard something of that sort before at the very opening of your remark and so takes it to be what she has heard before to the end, or is only a little confused by something in its course which does not quite exactly tally with what she expected. She seems to talk largely out of her memory; her travels overshadow her reasoning powers; her knowl-

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<sup>1</sup>Miss Mary Tremain to the author.

edge of the world makes her ignorant of conclusions which interpret the world,—etc. etc. But she is amiable—‘not wilful,’ she says—has some wholesome awe (quite diverting of course to me) of what is expected of her at Bryn Mawr, and can, I confidently expect, be dominated. But, dear me, what a strain & a bore it is to be all the year dominating. . . . I’m *tired* carrying female Fellows on my shoulders! . . .

“When I think of you, my little wife, I love this ‘College for Women,’ because *you* are a woman; but when I think only of myself, I hate the place very cordially. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

He is also hard put to it to meet the actual burdens of domestic economy:

“... coal I buy to-day, not much, however, for there’s not money enough in hand at present,—and I find that I cannot get it (coal) through the college. I am as yet in doubt, indeed, as to whether or no I can get it at the college prices. I find Dr. Rhoads not at all interested in the matter: we shall derive little or no pecuniary (economical) advantage from our connexion with this amiable institution: and, that being the case, what sort of advantage *will* we derive? That’s the conundrum at present amusing my thoughts. . . .

“I don’t see how a literary life can be built up on foundations of undergraduate instruction. That instruction compels you to live with the commonplaces, the A. B. C. of every subject and to dwell upon these with an emphasis and an invention altogether disproportioned to their intrinsic weight and importance—it keeps you on the dusty, century-travelled highroads of every subject, from which you get no outlooks except those that are catalogued and vulgarized in every guide-book. You get weary of the plodding and yet you get habituated to it, and find all excursions aside difficult—more and more so. What *is* a

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, October 4, 1887.

fellow to do? How is he to earn bread and at the same time find leisure for thoughts detached from the earning of bread? This is the problem we have to solve, darling—and every new difficulty or perplexity makes me the gladder that I am altogether and irrevocably

“Your own  
“WOODROW”<sup>1</sup>

#### X. “HUNGRY FOR A CLASS OF MEN”

All these worries and complexities, coupled with an outrageous amount of work on his book—besides outside writing which he was constantly trying to do, including a chapter on “Taxation and Appropriation” for a book his friend Albert Shaw was editing—began seriously to affect his health.

“I almost fear I shall break down in health here if I stay another year. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Again he began desperately to look about for a way of escape, where he could make a living for his growing family and at the same time pursue the studies he loved so passionately. His friend Renick revived his hope for an opening at Washington.

“The last day or two has brought me a curious temptation—you will know how strong a one for me when I state it. It seems that I am pretty generally and favourably known of in Washington and a friend there—not an influential one but a real one—has written to urge me that I ‘have steps taken’ to have my name put forward for the vacant (first) Asst. Sec’y’ship of State! He seems to think I’d have a good chance of success, as the office is not much in demand by politicians and Mr. Bayard, who likes gentlemenly, scholarly associates, is finding it hard to fill, since Porter’s resignation. Unhappily I don’t know a

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, October 8, 1887.

<sup>2</sup>Woodrow Wilson to Robert Bridges, November 30, 1887.

single influential person who would carry my name to Mr. B. I say 'unhappily,' because, absurd as the idea of my candidacy seems, if there's any chance (there are as young men in the other Asst. Sec'y-ships) I should hate to miss it. I would do my best to get honourably out of my engagements here and accept—for there's nothing I need more just at this present juncture (except a trip to Europe) than an inside seat in some dept. of the fed. govt. And, whether I could accept or not, the offer would be an invaluable card in my present calling—with the Johns Hopkins men, I know, and elsewhere, I am sure. If I knew any steps to take I would take them, just on the chance. It could do no harm. Don't you pity me, with my old political longings thus set throbbing again? Can you advise?"<sup>1</sup>

Nothing, however, comes of this opening—he has no political friends and no political influence whatsoever, and hope dies down again.

It was a "terrible winter." In the spring, he was overwhelmed by the death of his mother.

"Only a reason of the gravest character, I am conscious, can be reckoned sufficient to justify my apparent neglect of your letter; but, alas, I have such a reason. I have been so mastered by work and sorrow that it has not been possible for me to show in *any* way, to my dearest friends even, that I recognized any claims upon me but the not-to-be-shunned claims of the daily task. On the 15th of last month my dear mother suddenly died—my first news of her condition was news of her death. Your letter came while I was away with my poor bereaved father in Tennessee (I stayed as long as imperative duties here at all permitted); and since I returned I have had work enough to deaden the pain of my loss,—work enough (for it included some of the most difficult portions of my Baltimore

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Robert Bridges, November 5, 1887.



lectures) to have almost overwhelmed me under other circumstances. As it was I welcomed it—and I still rejoice in it—for the pull is still intense. My mother was a mother to me in the fullest, sweetest sense of the word, and her loss has left me with a sad, oppressive sense of having somehow suddenly *lost my youth*. I feel old and responsibility-ridden. I suppose that feeling will in time wear off, however, and that I shall ultimately get my balance again. In the meantime I crave your sympathy, old fellow—I need all you can give. And yet the worst of it is not my own bereavement, but my father's, whose daughters are both married, and who, with my college-boy brother, is left practically without a home. My own happy little home seems to reprove me on his account, in my morbid moments. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

When the chance came, therefore, to go to Wesleyan University in Connecticut, at a much higher salary than he had been receiving, he accepted eagerly. He felt that the contract with the Bryn Mawr trustees, as he wrote to Robert Bridges, was "no longer binding, for in it the trustees agreed to give me an assistant—that was the condition upon which I signed—; but they failed to appoint anyone." He was delighted with the prospect of teaching men:

"I have for a long time been hungry for a class of *men*."<sup>2</sup>

The summer of 1888 was spent in labour on his book, with a house "full of relatives"—he had the instincts of the hospitable Southerner—and much enjoyment of his wife and little girls. No man could have been happier in his family life. He leaned upon Mrs. Wilson for counsel and sympathy. Every line he wrote he read to her, eagerly seeking her suggestions. When they were separated, he wrote to her every day—not hasty scrawls, but long letters

<sup>1</sup>Letter to R. Heath Dabney, May 16, 1888.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Robert Bridges, August 26, 1888.

—*love* letters, in his beautiful script, pouring out all his perplexities and sharing every triumph. His own deep satisfaction with his married life could not be better expressed than in a letter he wrote congratulating his friend Dabney upon his approaching marriage:

Bryn Mawr, Pa.,  
31 May, 1888

MY DEAR HEATH,

I am heartily glad to get the good news contained in your welcome letter of the 22nd. To be married on June 19th! Hurrah! and again hurrah! I speak from the card when I say that you are about to do the very best thing a man—and especially a student, as it seems to me—could possibly do. No one is so sensitive, as a rule, as the student—and there's no cure for sensitiveness like a wife's sympathy,—no strength like that to be gotten from her love and trust. Marriage has been the *making* of me both intellectually and morally, and, judging by my own experience, I look forward to hearing the same pæan from you before many months are gone. Of course a fellow's ecstatically happy at first, and all that is genuine and to be cherished—that first feeling of conjugal union; but *afterwards*, as years are added to months, that first ecstasy is succeeded by something even better,—a settled, permeating, sustaining, invigorating sense of strength and completeness and satisfaction which a man, if he be a man, would not exchange for all the wealth and success and fame that the world contains! You can *imagine* all this now: but wait and see if your imagination has done the subject justice. So soon as a fellow begins living *for someone else* he finds himself. In every sense "love is the fulfilling of the law."

You will not charge me with growing sentimental, I know: I am not giving you my sentiments, but my convictions. My bachelor colleagues here think that bachelorhood is freedom,—freedom to buy books, to go to Europe in the summers, to indulge the hundred and one tastes and idiosyncrasies which the student allows himself; and so it is—there's no doubt about it, a wife and family do "tie a man down." But when he loses in *extension* he more than makes up in *intension*. He gets an expansion of nature, too, a broadening and sweetening of his

sympathies, and a rounding out of faculty such as come in no other way. He loses geographical and pecuniary freedom (if you will allow me the phrases) but *gains* moral and intellectual emancipation!

And now for what I sat down to say: *make your wedding tour include Bryn Mawr*, and convey to Miss Bentley our congratulations, keeping for yourself—the party chiefly to be felicitated—the heartiest good wishes and love of your sincere friends, Mrs. and Mr.

WOODROW WILSON

## CHAPTER XI

### WESLEYAN

1888-1890

A man is the part he plays among his fellows.

*When a Man Comes to Himself.*

There is a sense, I sometimes think, in which every one of us in whose life principle forms a part is merely holding up a light which he himself did not kindle, not his own principle, not something peculiar and individual to himself, but that light which must light all mankind, the love of truth, the love of duty, the love of those things which are not stated in the terms of personal interest.

Address January 19, 1909.

His mastery in the art of academic lecturing was presently an established fact.

*An Old Master.*

#### I. THE WILSONS IN NEW ENGLAND

WOODROW WILSON'S two years at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, were among the happiest of his whole life.

He and Mrs. Wilson, being Southerners, had heard much of the "coldness" of New England, and while this impression had been somewhat dissipated by Wilson's visit to Boston two years before, they came to Connecticut fearful that they might find the crust hard to break. They were delighted with the cordiality of their reception. Their own house not being ready for occupancy, they and their children were guests for several days in the homes of Professor Crawford<sup>1</sup> and Professor Van Vleck.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Morris B. Crawford, professor of physics.

<sup>2</sup>J. M. Van Vleck, then acting president of the college.



"I shall never forget the easy and companionable manner in which they fitted into our home life and into the new fellowship of our faculty."<sup>1</sup>

In November Wilson wrote to Bridges:

"We have been taken possession of by these good New Eng. folks and are, instead of making, to be given our 'Thanksgiving'."<sup>2</sup>

They went to live at 106 High Street, an old colonial house which faced the broad grounds of the campus. When Charles Dickens visited Middletown years before, he called High Street "the most beautiful avenue in America." The row of dignified brownstone buildings which then constituted the college was located on the hill above, among stately trees. From the spacious yard about the house, a rare playground for the two little girls, one could look off across the roofs of the village to the Connecticut River.<sup>3</sup> A block away lived Professor Winchester,<sup>4</sup> and just around the corner, Crawford and Van Vleck. The college was small, only two hundred and eighteen students, so that the community somewhat resembled a large family.

Here, for a time, Wilson found the kind of intellectual environment, combined with simple living and generous, unaffected social contacts, which he loved. Here were men to meet and men to teach; here was a well-stocked library; and an ampler income relieved some of the sharper domestic problems. He and Professor Winchester, one of the most accomplished English scholars in America, at once became fast friends. Winchester had expressed keen approval of Wilson's first distinctly literary essay, "An Old Master,"<sup>5</sup> which had just been published<sup>5</sup> in the *New Prince-*

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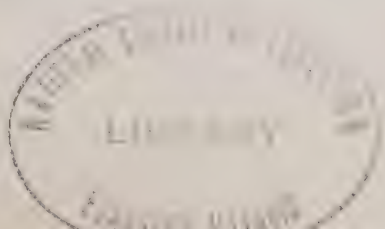
<sup>1</sup>Professor Morris B. Crawford to the author.

<sup>2</sup>November 27, 1888.

<sup>3</sup>The house has been replaced by a student club.

<sup>4</sup>C. T. Winchester, then professor of rhetoric and English literature.

<sup>5</sup>September, 1888.



*ton Review*. It had literary flavour, and it touched a subject, the improvement in quality of college lecturing, in which both men were intensely interested. Wilson always considered Winchester as being, next to Minor of the University of Virginia, the greatest teacher he ever knew. He also enjoyed Professor Rice, Professor Atwater, Professor James, and others, and he was soon drawn into one of those delightful small clubs known in college towns—the “Conversational Club”—where men can open their minds in free discussion. In such a group Wilson was at his best. Soon after he arrived, he and Mrs. Wilson united with the First Congregational Church<sup>1</sup>—they had formed no church connection at Bryn Mawr—and Wilson became a lifelong friend of its minister, the Reverend Dr. A. W. Hazen.

He attacked his college work, especially the lectures, with keen zest. There was something about him, an aliveness, an enthusiasm, an earnestness, that was infectious. It communicated itself at once to the student body; it made him a power with his associates in the faculty. He was lecturing upon subjects usually considered abstruse, but he made them so fascinating that, as one student said: “I could never stop to take notes.”<sup>2</sup>

“Every man in his class felt inspired to do his very best, not because of any exhortation or threat, or even suggestion, from Wilson himself, but from the very atmosphere of his personality; not a feeling of fear of consequences was present, but a feeling that you were ashamed if you were not at your best.”<sup>2</sup>

Another student said of him:

“I can see him now with his hands forward, the tips of his fingers just touching the table, his face earnest and

<sup>1</sup>November 4, 1888.

<sup>2</sup>C. F. Price, in the *Wesleyan University Alumnus*, March, 1924.

animated, many times illuminating an otherwise dry and tedious subject by his beautiful language and his apt way of putting things."<sup>1</sup>

They did not know, of course, of the immense care and labour that Wilson put upon those lectures. He was never content with anything he did unless it was done well, with art. Impatient as he was by temperament, he never allowed himself to do anything poorly or cheaply. He wrote thousands of letters by hand, and there is not an illegible word, let alone an illegible line, in any one of them. Good order, beauty, completeness, were a part of his very religion.

It was so with his lecturing. He was not content to be "dull and easy,"<sup>2</sup> he must master his subject, master his students. He once said that he never worked so hard at anything in his life as he did upon his college lectures.<sup>2</sup> He was sharply self-critical, and if a lecture did not "go" on one day, he worked to improve it.

"I have gotten the impression, somehow (perhaps through my imagination), that my two lectures, so far delivered, have fallen rather flat, and I feel a whit discouraged: but the attention of the class must, shall, be conquered before I get through with them. It's my sensibilities, rather than my courage, that are wounded. To tell the truth, my second lecture was poor,—thrown together, undigested, ill-arranged, inorganic: I can do better. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

"Mastery over the class"<sup>3</sup> was always his objective. He must make them understand, "get exactly what I have to give them."

"There have been very few professors, lecturing on ab-

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<sup>1</sup>C. F. Price, in the Wesleyan University *Alumnus*, March, 1924.

<sup>2</sup>Edith Bolling Wilson to the author.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, February 13, 1889, written from Baltimore.

struse subjects, such as economics, jurisprudence, and politics, who have dared to give so free a rein to an instinct frankly artistic."<sup>1</sup>

If he could not "stand before the Senate," according to his early aspiration, he could at least stand before and inspire young men, some one of whom might one day realize the ambition he himself had cherished and resigned!

"Some of the subtlest and most lasting effects of genuine oratory have gone forth from secluded lecture desks into the hearts of quiet groups of students. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

For this purpose he himself studied "the old masters of learned discourse."<sup>3</sup>

"With Lanfranc one could get the infinite charm of the old monastic school life; with Abélard, the undying excitement of philosophical and religious controversy; with Colet, the fire of reforming zeal; with Blackstone, the satisfactions of clarified learning."<sup>3</sup>

His success, years later, as a political speaker, as the statesman addressing Congress, or appearing before the most distinguished audiences in Europe, was no accident. He had learned the art of the clear and beautiful exposition of difficult subjects; and he knew how to master his hearers. He had learned by years of training in classrooms, in capturing the interest and firing the imagination of restless college students.

## II. THE WESLEYAN "HOUSE OF COMMONS"

It was not only as a lecturer that Wilson began to put his impress upon the student body. He could talk about politics and government: he wished also to experiment with the principles he was elucidating. We have seen him,

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<sup>1</sup>Professor George McLean Harper of Princeton in an introduction to *President Wilson's Addresses*, page xiv.

<sup>2</sup>*An Old Master*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.



time after time in his life, organizing societies modelled after the British House of Commons, where all the machinery of parliamentary government controlled by debate could be put in action. A kind of political laboratory! It was so at Wesleyan. On January 5, 1889, Wilson called a meeting of the student body and, after a stirring address in which he attacked the dull old college debating society—"a galvanic movement simulating life, but not life"—he described, with a "kind of infectious enthusiasm," a new organization to be called the "Wesleyan House of Commons."

"The effect of the ordinary debating society is unfortunate. To argue any case on any side, without the basis of a conviction of any sort, is mental suicide. In the ordinary debating society some financial spur to effect attendance and interest is administered, while the generation of interest is the best spur.

"The function of our new organization is the function of debate, which is the basis for the special art of oratory. Highest oratory is arrived at through the cultivation of the art of debate. To imitate the House of Representatives would be patriotic, but not interesting. The House of Representatives does not do its own debating, but refers most of its business to standing committees, and if the committees recommend, the House is apt to pass the resolution as a matter of course. So we shall imitate the British House of Commons, thereby introducing a dramatic element in that a body of ministers resigns when defeated."<sup>1</sup>

The project was immediately and unanimously adopted—"Professor Wilson's remarks were received with great applause"—and in the succeeding months carried through its meetings with a gusto that marked it as one of the "deep-remembered moments" of Wesleyan history. Meetings were crowded, the subjects were debated with hot

<sup>1</sup>*The Wesleyan Argus*, January 18, 1889, p. 80.

seriousness, governments were formed and turned out. For once an academic activity was as vital in college life as football; and occupied almost as much space in college conversation and in college publications. A motion to limit each speaker to one speech and to ten minutes was lost because Professor Wilson (called upon to give his opinion, though not a voting member of the body) said that he favoured giving each speaker unlimited time. "The House," said he, "is a body which can defend itself against any one trying to impose on it. It has lungs and the door is open. Slow men often have very good things to say and they are often worth waiting for."<sup>2</sup>

The enthusiasm continued almost to the end of Wilson's service at Wesleyan, but the game of turning out ministries became too tempting a diversion for the boys, and the movement degenerated. But more than one man who afterward entered public life found stimulation in the Wesleyan House of Commons.<sup>1</sup>

Wilson entered with the same eager enthusiasm into college athletics, although not at all athletic himself. Here he saw an opportunity, just as in the organization of the House of Commons, to awaken a genuine college spirit by securing a new unity of effort. Even the small student body at Wesleyan was divided into more or less jealous cliques, led by the secret societies, and men were chosen not primarily because of their capacities, but because they had behind them this or that group or society. Wilson once said that he got his first clear knowledge of boss politics from watching the methods of student politicians: and much of his later opposition to the club system at Princeton, which resulted in a bitter struggle, had its roots in his early observation of political methods in the small world of college life. He hated anything that handicapped real

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick M. Davenport, afterward Congressman from New York, was clerk. A. W. Patch was the first speaker.

ability, or substituted social privilege for free opportunity—which is the core of the democratic point of view.<sup>1</sup>

He became a leader in coaching the football team, was elected on the Advisory Board, and helped to build up one of the greatest, if not the greatest football team Wesleyan ever had, defeating one after another the University of Pennsylvania, Amherst, Williams, Rutgers, and Trinity (but losing to Princeton). He found an assumption prevailing in the college that Wesleyan, being so small a college, could not expect to win from the great universities. He combated it hotly. "Go in to win; don't admit defeat before you start." The test game of the year was with Lehigh on Thanksgiving Day.<sup>2</sup> It was played in a sea of mud.

"Twice Lehigh scored easy touchdowns, and it seemed as though Wesleyan faced certain defeat, when suddenly, from the Wesleyan bleachers a man walked out in front, clad in heavy rubber boots and a raincoat. He shouted to the Wesleyan contingent, reproaching them for not cheering for their team; and at once began to lead them in the Wesleyan yell, beating time for them with his umbrella. This he continued violently until . . . the tide of the game turned."<sup>3</sup>

The team made two touchdowns and tied the Lehigh score. After the game, the Lehigh players, inquiring about the magnetic cheer leader, were informed that he was Wesleyan's professor of history, Dr. Woodrow Wilson.

"He's all right," they returned, "he saved you."

All of these things added to Wilson's already great popularity. Students marched to serenade him, and he made them witty speeches. He radiated enthusiasm, gave a

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<sup>1</sup>Dean Frank W. Nicolson of Wesleyan told Walter Camp that Wilson's great service to athletics was his insistence upon "minimizing the fraternity influence in choice of players for teams."

<sup>2</sup>1889.

<sup>3</sup>Carl F. Price, in the Wesleyan University *Alumnus*, March, 1924.

new current to life. "He made everything he touched interesting." The college annual, *Olla Podrida*, which expressed real student opinion, wrote of him:

Prof. W—i—n.

"A merrier man

Within the limit of becoming mirth  
I never spent an hour's talk withal."

### III. POLITICAL INTERESTS

These college activities, however, made up only a part of the man's extraordinary labours. He was giving also a series of twenty-five lectures each year at Johns Hopkins and was much on call for addresses—at Hartford, at Northampton, at Brown University, and elsewhere. He was busy with his writing, finishing in the spring of 1889 the last proofs of *The State*—which was published that fall. He wrote to his friend Dabney:

"I asked D. C. Heath to send you a copy of the text-book I have just published, and I hope you will understand my love written on the fly-leaf. A *fact* book is always a plebeian among books, and it is a fact book; but a great deal has gone out of me into it, none the less, and I hope you will receive it kindly on that account."<sup>1</sup>

And *The State* was not well out of the way before he accepted the invitation of Professor A. B. Hart of Harvard to contribute to the "Epoch" series a volume which was later known as *Division and Reunion*, and upon this he began work at once. It was a subject that much interested him, the period of American history from 1829 to 1889, a period much misrepresented by writers both North and South, since it covered the bitter years of sectional division.

"Let me say that I particularly appreciate your reference to judging the part played by the South during the

<sup>1</sup>October 31, 1889.



period of which I am to write. Your confidence in my impartiality I greatly value—and shall hope to deserve. Though born in the South and bred in its sympathies, I am not of Southern-born parents. My father was born in Ohio, my mother in England. Ever since I have had independent judgments of my own I have been a Federalist (!) It is this mixture of elements in me—full identification with the South, non-Southern blood, and Federalist principles—that makes me hope that a detachment of my affectionate, reminiscent sympathies from my historical judgments is not beyond hoping for.”<sup>1</sup>

His chief interest in a work of this sort, of course, was political—“learning the political history of America.” It must never be forgotten that, however ardent and successful his work in college, the absorbing concern of his life was government and the problems presented by democratic institutions. He said little outside about all this; but his letters are full of it, and no other subject more deeply stirred his emotions. The election of Harrison was a profound disappointment to him. He wrote from Baltimore, where he was lecturing at Johns Hopkins:

“It looks as if the Hopkins current toward Washington would run so strongly on Monday that I may be swept into it. I suppose I ought to see an inauguration, but it will be a very bitter pill to see this one—embodying, as it does, the beginning of the reign of almost every idea and influence with which I do not sympathize. I can work off the ill humour that may result, however, by resort to the Eng. Local Govt. Act.”<sup>2</sup>

Two days later he wrote:

“No inauguration for me to-day: it is raining steadily here. . . . We have had very bad, very trying and depressing weather here almost ever since I got back—you know

<sup>1</sup>Woodrow Wilson to Professor Albert Bushnell Hart, June 3, 1889.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, March 2, 1889.

how dark, damp weather affects your unreasonable husband. . . . It's fit enough weather, however, to mark the incoming of the Blaine Republicans to the control of the government."<sup>1</sup>

On March 6th he wrote:

"Have you heard the Cabinet? Blaine, Secretary of State; Windom (a very respectable man), Treasury; Wanamaker Post-master General; the rest men never heard of till nominated, outside of their own immediate neighbourhood—local lawyers of no significance—except Rusk of Minnesota (?)<sup>2</sup> who has been governor, without distinction, and is now in the newly created Department as Secretary of Agriculture. Rather a poor beginning, I take it. What is to be the *policy* of such an administration? I don't know whether to laugh or to rage."

And ten days later he expressed himself strongly:

"It's singular, considering the judicial frame of mind I *try* to cultivate, what a partisan I am in politics. Somehow, since this reactionary Administration came in, my interest in Washington and governmental affairs there has suffered a decided collapse—temporary, I hope, but none the less real. I feel hostile, instead of helpful as I ought to feel. I'm rather glad to go over for a Saturday and a Sunday, instead of any other days, and spend the time exactly as if I were in any other town, *not* the capital of the country. Are you ashamed of me? Not, I am afraid, as much as you ought to be! For you are more of a partisan, Miss, than I am."<sup>3</sup>

His interest is by no means confined to American politics. His letters and writings of the time bear evidence of the eagerness—even excitement—with which he follows British affairs and, in lesser degree, the politics of France

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, March 4, 1889.

<sup>2</sup>Rusk was from Wisconsin.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, March 15, 1889.

and the Continent. He reads closely the English reviews and weeklies and is constantly comparing the problems of Europe with our own, seeking for wise judgments. He writes to his wife, for example, on February 27, 1889:

"No letter from home as yet to-day, and so I am driven to fall back for agreeable thoughts upon the good news from London—since you don't see the papers I shall assume that you have not heard it, and give myself the satisfaction of repeating it. Pigott, the fellow who supplied the *Times* with the Parnell letters upon which that enterprising journal has been basing its charges of crime against the Irish Nationalist party (the charge which the Commission has been trying) has confessed that he forged them (at least the most important and damaging of them) and the *Times* is thoroughly discredited in the whole matter. Parnell is virtually cleared, and, what is more, it now looks as if the Nationalist cause had received an important impulse forward. Even the *Standard* (the London N. Y. *Tribune*) concedes these points and advises the *Times* to surrender at discretion rather than make a still worse impression on the public mind. I know that you will agree with me that this is good news. The next elections promise to give the Gladstonians a signal triumph. The news has positively excited me."

Very often his speeches, like the address on George Washington delivered in the church at Middletown, April 30, 1889, are made vital by references to current affairs:

"Those of you who have followed the course of events in France and who share with all lovers of liberty the anxiety caused by the present posture of her affairs will know whence my best illustration will be drawn. You know how straight M. Monod has pointed his finger at his country's trouble in what he says in the current (the April) number of the *Contemporary Review*. 'France,' he says, 'is

suffering mainly from moral instability and diseases of the imagination, the result of a too sudden rupture with her own traditions.'"<sup>1</sup>

The greatest book of the day on American Democracy was, of course, Bryce's *American Commonwealth*. Wilson pounced upon it with a kind of passion, characteristically underscored its significant passages, filled it with side notes, in short, tore the very vitals out of it and prepared a review for the *Political Science Quarterly*<sup>2</sup>—as good a criticism of the work as was ever written. He compared Bryce with De Tocqueville, tried to get at the real meaning of democracy, commented upon the nature of leadership in the free state, and considered the problems that lay just ahead.

Wilson gave much hard thinking to all of the great issues of government during the year 1889, drawing some of his conclusions together in an article which he wrote for his friend Scudder of the *Atlantic Monthly*.<sup>3</sup>

The essentials of his political philosophy—which were later to change no more than the religious principles he had accepted—are all crystal clear in these writings. He has "thought himself through," knows exactly where he stands and what he believes.

He sees democracy as a growth, not an invention; a life, not a machine; an effect, not a cause.

"Democracy is of course wrongly conceived when treated as merely a body of doctrine, or as simply a form of government. It is a stage of development. It is not created by aspirations or by new faith: it is built up by

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<sup>1</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 183-184.

<sup>2</sup>March, 1889. Wilson had met Bryce at Baltimore, and Bryce had been much impressed by Wilson's *Congressional Government*, referring to it in the *American Commonwealth*. Sidney Webb, years later, told Professor Winthrop M. Daniels that he thought Bryce greatly indebted to Wilson for many of his ideas.

<sup>3</sup>"Character of Democracy in the United States," published November, 1889, and included in the volume entitled *An Old Master*.



## Clay & Webster Contrasted

Clay the leader. Attracted and commanded men. Had the ideas of expansion and of material advancement which were essentially American. Could manage men. Could accommodate policies. Was the life of the Whig party, the idol of the country. No reasoner, but an incomparable politician and immediate orator.

Webster the constructive reasoner and the idealist. No party leader - too cold, too aloof, too unsympathetic - too little apt at short reasoning. He conceived, and, what was much more potent and important, incomparably expressed, the national spirit of the Constitution. A Conservative, because so deeply penetrated by the historical sense, so pious in traditions. A national leader and an incomparable force for permanent progress (as Clay was not) because of his constant magnificent expression of the national idea - his reading of it into the Constitution, and his communication of it to the conviction and imagination of the people.

Compare Mellen Chamberlain, Century Magazine,  
"A Sketch of Webster", vol. XLVI., p. 709 (Sept. '93).

A page of Wilson's notes

slow habit. Its process is experience, its basis old wont, its meaning national organic unity and effectual life. It comes, like manhood, as the fruit of youth: immature peoples cannot have it, and the maturity to which it is vouchsafed is the maturity of freedom and self-control, and no other. It is conduct, and its only stable foundation is character. America has democracy because she is free; she is not free because she has democracy. A particular form of government may no more be adopted than a particular form of character may be adopted: both institutions and character must be developed by conscious effort and through transmitted aptitudes.”<sup>1</sup>

He sees American history not as a break with the past, but as a steady growth out of it.

“The government which we founded one hundred years ago was no type of an experiment in advanced democracy, as we allowed Europe and even ourselves to suppose; it was simply an adaptation of English constitutional government.”<sup>2</sup>

Democracy cannot be attained by revolutions, by radical overturn, but by cultivating slowly and deeply the spirit of democratic relationships.

“The English alone have approached popular institutions *through habit*. All other races have rushed prematurely into them through mere impatience with habit: have adopted democracy, instead of cultivating it.”<sup>3</sup>

He agrees entirely with Burke’s attitude toward the French Revolution.

“Monarchies may be made, but democracies must grow.”

One of Wilson’s biographers, who did not understand him at all, speaks of him as a “two-fisted radical.” He

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<sup>1</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, pp. 176-177.

<sup>2</sup>*An Old Master*, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 177.

was exactly not that. He was an intense traditionalist; if you like, an intense conservative. But it was the conservatism of the spirit, not of the form. He wanted to return to the essence of the great American tradition. In order to do that, abuses must be broken down; that might hurt, but it would restore the health of the state.

"... we shall preserve our institutions in their integrity and efficiency only so long as we keep true in our practice to the traditions from which our first strength was derived. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

"It is easier," as he said, "to be new than to be old." It is easier to shout for revolutionary miracles, or reform by swift changes in law or method, than "patiently and resolutely to face the problems of a crowded and perplexed civilization"—to keep the spirit pure, the character strong, and to be sure that the spirit and the habit of democracy lay firmly underneath the forms of democracy. For himself, he would choose the old, sure, slow way.

With these convictions absolutely clear in his own soul, buttressed by the entire force of his personality, he could speak straight to all that was best and highest in the American spirit, for he spoke its deepest traditions.

It was not long before shrewd outside observers began to feel the power of the young professor of history—to see, indeed, exactly what his message was. Wilson inaugurated, for example, in November, 1889, a series of lectures at Brown University on "State and Social Reforms."<sup>2</sup> The *Boston Herald* in an editorial<sup>3</sup> thus speaks of Wilson's address:

"His lecture was chiefly valuable for showing that the eager hopes of the socialists, who expect the state to ad-

<sup>1</sup>*An Old Master*, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup>Other speakers in the series were General Francis Walker, Edward Atkinson, Davis R. Dewey, and Edward Everett Hale.

<sup>3</sup>November 12, 1889.

just the economic conditions of industry to the needs of individuals by some general law, are impossible of realization, except through the natural movement of institutions. If future lectures in this course shall be kept equally close to fact, and shall treat important issues constructively, they will be decidedly helpful in educating public opinion."

It was the slow building up of confidence in the man through those who heard him lecture or who read his writings for many years that brought him finally upon the great stage of public affairs. He impressed men with a sense of power, certainty, leadership. He began to be honoured. He received his first honorary degree at Wake Forest University in North Carolina in 1887, he was elected president of the Johns Hopkins Alumni Association, he was taken into Phi Beta Kappa. And all the time he saw with a prophetic eye, as he looked out from his college study, that a "time of change" was coming. Who would there be to lead the forces of reconstruction and renewal?

"America is now sauntering through her resources and through the mazes of her politics with easy nonchalance; but presently there will come a time when she will be surprised to find herself grown old,—a country crowded, strained, perplexed,—when she will be obliged to fall back upon her conservatism, obliged to pull herself together, adopt a new regimen of life, husband her resources, concentrate her strength, steady her methods, sober her views, restrict her vagaries, trust her best, not her average, members. That will be the time of change."<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. A NEW "COMING TO HIMSELF"—RELIGIOUS INTERESTS

Reference has been made in former chapters to the series of strange crises in Woodrow Wilson's life: how, from time to time, he "came to himself," as he described it—reli-

<sup>1</sup>*The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. I, p. 172.



giously at sixteen, intellectually as a Princeton student, emotionally in 1883. They are remarkable for being such sharp and clearly defined experiences—turning points! Something of the sort came to him in his second year at Wesleyan, came with his deep thinking upon political problems. It was a political coming to himself—an arrival at solid conclusions, a clear statement of his faith, a strong aspiration to go forward. And as usual he sees, none more accurately, what is happening to him:

“Have I told you that latterly—since I have been here, a distinct *feeling* of maturity—or rather of maturing—has come over me? The *boyish* feeling that I have so long had and cherished is giving place, consciously, to another feeling—the feeling that I am no longer young (though not old quite!) and that I need no longer hesitate (as I have so long and sensitively done) to assert myself and my opinions in the presence of and against the selves and opinions of old men, ‘my elders.’ It may be all imagination, but these are the facts of consciousness at the present moment in one Woodrow Wilson—always a slow fellow in mental development—long a child, longer a diffident youth, now at last, perhaps, becoming a self-confident (mayhap a self-assertive) man. I find I look older, my former (Princeton) college friends here being the witnesses.”<sup>21</sup>

As usual also, these deep stirrings of his nature, these changes, are connected with a new religious impulse. He was profoundly moved by a four-day visit of Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist, to Middletown. Afterward he described something of the effect Moody had upon him:

“I was in a very plebeian place. I was in a barber’s shop, sitting in a chair, when I became aware that a personality had entered the room. A man had come quietly in upon the same errand as myself and sat in the next chair to me. Every word that he uttered, though it was not in the least

<sup>21</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, March 9, 1889.

didactic, showed a personal and vital interest in the man who was serving him; and before I got through with what was being done to me, I was aware that I had attended an evangelistic service, because Mr. Moody was in the next chair. I purposely lingered in the room after he left and noted the singular effect his visit had upon the barbers in that shop. They talked in undertones. They did not know his name, but they knew that something had elevated their thought. And I felt that I left that place as I should have left a place of worship."<sup>1</sup>

Years later, when he was President of the United States, a friend wrote to ask him if this incident were only a legend. He replied:

MY DEAR DOCTOR BRIDGMAN:

No, this is not a legend; it is a fact, and I am perfectly willing that you should publish it. My admiration and esteem for Mr. Moody was very deep indeed.

Cordially and sincerely yours,  
WOODROW WILSON.<sup>2</sup>

Several of his friends at Wesleyan had glimpses of this religious spirit, deeply reserved and yet expressing itself:

"... I love to recall one occasion when he conducted the morning college chapel service. He was accustomed to take his turn with other members of the faculty in this service, and usually, instead of offering extemporaneous prayer, he would read,—and that too in a beautifully reverent and impressive manner,—the form of morning prayer prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer to be used in families. But one morning, while Mr. Moody was conducting a series of meetings in Middletown, Mr. Wilson, who evidently had been touched, as we all had been, by the intense earnestness of the great evangelist, voiced his prayer for us in his own words, which, by their earnest-

<sup>1</sup>The *Congregationalist*, November 12, 1914.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

ness, their originality and beauty of expression, their precise adaptation to the demands of the moment, were far more effective than any possible prescribed form of prayer could have been. Nobody who heard that prayer could doubt that Woodrow Wilson was a man of profound faith in God."<sup>1</sup>

#### V. INTIMATE LIFE AT WESLEYAN

Wilson's home life at Wesleyan, as at Bryn Mawr, was one of the utmost happiness. It was extremely simple, and every penny that could be saved went into books that were needed in his work. Stockton Axson relates an incident which occurred during the visit of Dr. Thomas Hoyt of Philadelphia, Mrs. Wilson's rather aristocratic uncle:

"Once when Uncle Tom was visiting us in Middletown, Mr. Wilson broke into a soft chuckle while he and I were sitting alone.

"'What are you laughing at?' I asked.

"He replied: 'To think how I blacked Uncle Tom's boots this morning. Passing his bedroom door, I saw that he had put his boots outside, naturally assuming that all self-respecting people keep a man. I knew Bridget wouldn't black them, and Annie couldn't, so there was nothing to do but tackle the job myself.'"<sup>2</sup>

In October, 1889, a third daughter, Eleanor Randolph,<sup>3</sup> was born. He wrote to Bridges:

"My *big* piece of news is, that three weeks ago another daughter was born to us. Both mother and baby are doing and feeling splendidly. There is now 'the baby, the little baby, and the littlest baby of all.'"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Morris B. Crawford, in the Wesleyan University *Alumnus*, March, 1924.

<sup>2</sup>Professor Stockton Axson, "The Private Life of President Wilson."

<sup>3</sup>Now Mrs. William G. McAdoo.

<sup>4</sup>November 6, 1889.

As at Bryn Mawr, he and Mrs. Wilson drew into their home various young relatives to educate. Stockton Axson, Mrs. Wilson's brother, lived with them and went to Wesleyan University; Mary Hoyt was a visitor. She gives a vivid glimpse of an incident in the Christmas holidays of 1889:

"I was very keen to see the wonderful new baby, who did, indeed, look like a rosebud. And I came in very close contact with her because, during those holidays, Ellen had a terrible accident. She spilled a kettle full of boiling lard over her feet. I shall never forget the look on Cousin Woodrow's face when he brought her upstairs in his arms, nor the look on Ellen's face when she said:

"'He brought me up all of those stairs in his arms.'

"Somehow I seemed to understand what married love could mean. Until my holiday was over, I bathed the baby every morning, with Cousin Woodrow more or less in attendance to hand me the things I had forgotten, and Ellen to give directions from her bed."

Whenever Wilson was away from home, he literally counted the days until his return:

"Lecture No. 8 was delivered this morning: the end of this week will see at least ten off my hands—and I shall feel almost halfway to my deliverance—my return to you."<sup>1</sup>

"Sunday is a dreary day with me in one respect: I get no letter from you and so feel as if our separation were increased in *distance* as well as in *time*. Cut off, for the time, from communication, I seem cut off from comfort too, and therefore from a feeling of security about you. I am more anxious about you on Sunday than on any other day."<sup>2</sup>

"... I never discovered my whole self till you brought

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, February 26, 1889.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, March 3, 1889.



your sweet love and sympathy into my life. You have 'drawn me out,' as I have so often told you, as I never would have been drawn out had you not been so daring as to love and marry me. Your love has brought to me self-revelation of the most remarkable kind."<sup>1</sup>

He was a man, indeed, deeply dependent upon friends, upon sympathy. He could not live without it. He still cherished and rested upon the love of his father. He wrote:

"I received just now—much to my delight, as you may imagine—a four-page letter from dear father: four pages of his best letter-writing, his best both for love-matter and for expression—and you know how delightful an epistle that means. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

There was never a man who could maintain deeper and more vital human relationships. He could hate too—but what friends he had! One of those who speaks of him as "one of the most loyal friends I ever had" was the Reverend Dr. Hazen of Middletown. Wilson's letters to him are full of affection. Years after leaving Middletown, he wrote:

"I don't know how many long letters to you I have planned,—full of the many things I have thought,—*we* have thought,—of you and Mrs. Hazen, our dear friends, as our minds have turned again and again to Middletown and the two years, good to think of, which we spent there. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Here are extracts from two other letters written to Dr. Hazen during busy later years:

"In these days of strain nothing is quite so sweet to me as the voice of an old friend and the thought that I am being remembered so generously and so affectionately."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Ellen Axson Wilson, March 10, 1889.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, March 8, 1889.

<sup>3</sup>March 29, 1897.

<sup>4</sup>May 14, 1914.

And in a pathetic letter written during his illness and signed "affectionately yours" he says:

"I treasure your friendship and every evidence of it heartens and helps me. It is by means of such support that a man manages to pass over the hard places in life without disheartenment."<sup>1</sup>

He had a way of putting an indelible impress upon ardent young men—as he did upon Winthrop M. Daniels who came to see him at Middletown in the spring of 1890 and who was afterward to join him at Princeton, and years later to be appointed by him a member of the Interstate Commerce Commission. They were lifelong friends. Daniels retains a vivid memory of his first meeting with Wilson:

"The walls of his study were lined to the ceiling with books in orderly array, but the somewhat cramped dimensions of the room and the towering shelves of volumes, only dimly outlined, created an atmosphere of something like severity. During our interview I remember thinking that Mr. Wilson's features—he sat facing the window—were the only clearly distinct thing in the room. . . .

"I have tried to recall my impressions of Mr. Wilson upon this occasion. . . . The naturalness of his talk and manner would have disarmed all attempt at descriptive analysis, had I ever been capable of such artificial portraiture. His face was long, though I confess that until later partisan caricature exaggerated the length of his lower jaw, it had never occurred to me as one of his noticeable facial characteristics. I remember some years later in his study at Princeton to have been impressed by a striking photograph upon the mantelpiece of Mommsen, the German historian. The photograph is well known, and represents the *Forscher* as an old man with a preternaturally long wisp of thin gray hair that curves warily along

<sup>1</sup>December 31, 1922.

the side of his face below his chin. The eye of Mommsen was the eye of Wilson, searching, significant, penetrating, unforgettable, with an unquestionable gravity, and at times almost protuberant as if by an internal intellectual impulse. His play of facial expression was always dominated by his eye. His features were sensitive and mobile; his lips fine and full, and at times the tip of his nose, especially when he was amused, would tilt slightly downward, out of alignment with the nasal bridge. His countenance was at once arresting, sometimes grimly arresting, but always distinguished.

"Our interview was brief, though he showed no indication of finding tiresome what he must have known were the immature observations of a callow young student."

In spite of the intensity and seriousness of Wilson's nature, in spite of his devotion to his work, he could play, though it usually required a friend to draw him on. He enjoyed tennis at Wesleyan with the younger professors, and occasionally he got away for a real outing with Bridges:

"August 28, 1889. . . . Last night Bridges and I went to hear young Southern [Sothern] in *Lord Chumley* and enjoyed it much. This afternoon—or, rather, as soon as I get through with this letter—I shall go to Coney Island, for the boat-ride etc. So you see I am 'going it' already. Weather delightful, I am enjoying myself."

"August 29, 1889. . . . My programme yesterday was—Coney Island including Vanity Fair at one end and a capital orchestral concert at the other (Manhattan Beach) end. Coming back in time for the theatre, I went to see *Bootle's Baby* and was much edified. It's really a very good thing.

"I fancy when I look around at the theatres that they are full of Southern people.

"Bobby wants me to go *outside* to Baltimore with him

(on his way home) and then to return thence by steamer to Boston, on *my* way home, and I'm half inclined to do it. What do you think?"

"August 30, 1889. . . . Had a delightful day at quiet Seabright yesterday—came back sunburned and happy. For to-day I have no programme as yet except to see the professional base-ball match this afternoon. To-morrow I shall probably go outside to Longbranch."

"August 31, 1889. . . . I found your first letter at the P. O. yesterday. I had asked twice before there, and had rec'd the preface and title-page proof; but had not asked for the letter at the right time.

"Yesterday I loafed and went to the Eden Musée (!) in the morning, and the afternoon went to see my first professional game of base-ball. The latter I enjoyed immensely. It was between the two best nines in the country—Boston and New York.

"At night I saw Sol. Smith Russell in *A Poor Relation*—a really capital thing well done."<sup>1</sup>

He was to leave Wesleyan with keen regret: but the call to a greater field was inevitable. He had taken a remarkable hold upon the place and the people:

"I doubt whether any man in the faculty of Wesleyan University ever gained the same degree of popularity with the student body which fell to the lot of Professor Wilson."<sup>2</sup>

The college journal spoke of his going with deep regret:

"During his two years' occupancy of the chair of history and political economy, Professor Wilson has won the cordial esteem of the entire body of undergraduates, both by his work in the class-room and his active support

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<sup>1</sup>Letters to Ellen Axson Wilson.

<sup>2</sup>Address on Woodrow Wilson delivered by William North Rice at the Memorial Service in the North Congregational Church, Middletown, February 6, 1924. Printed in the Wesleyan University *Alumnus* for May, 1924.



of all the athletic interests of the college. As an instructor, Professor Wilson does much more than impart knowledge; he has clearly defined opinions concerning the lessons taught by the history of the past, and their bearing upon the future, and while never unduly obtruding those opinions upon his students, he does not fail, as the occasions present themselves, to inculcate those practical lessons of political duty which the patriot can never learn too well. His work has been an inspiration to the students who have sat under his instruction."<sup>1</sup>

The college offered to create a chair for him if he would remain<sup>2</sup> but the call was too strong; and, moreover, as he tells Bridges, ". . . this is in truth a delightful place to work, but it is not a sufficiently stimulating place."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, he loved the place and the people; and he refused to leave them after one year, though tempted by offers from Princeton, lest it embarrass them.

MY DEAR BOB,

. . . I am under no *contract* obligation to stay here any longer than I choose; but when I came here the department of which I have charge had, in incompetent hands, greatly run down at the time of my election. They wanted it built up; that I have been partially able to do: but, were I to leave it now it would collapse again, for a small college like this has by no means the same chances for obtaining a good or even a tolerable man on short notice that Princeton has. The men here have made me respect and admire them very much. They are earnest and capable teachers and liberal men. The college is changing horses crossing a stream—is getting a new president of unknown tendencies just as it had decisively undertaken

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<sup>1</sup>*The Wesleyan Argus*, June 28, 1890, pp. 173-174.

<sup>2</sup>Woodrow Wilson to Horace E. Scudder, December 23, 1889.

<sup>3</sup>Letter of January 27, 1890.

a new and liberal policy likely to make the college thoroughly first class of its kind. I believe that another year's work would enable me not only to clear my own docket but also to put a deep stamp on the department; possibly to choose my own successor—certainly to do my full duty by the college—and I am inclined to regard these considerations as conclusive. I know that they would not have called me here had they not felt reasonably assured of keeping me at least two years—and they have treated me not only honourably but generously.”<sup>1</sup>

Years later, while President, he wrote to one of his students of the class of 1890, one who, indeed, had taken much interest in the Wesleyan House of Commons:

“My own thought turns back with the greatest pleasure to the memories of my two years at Wesleyan. I have always felt that they were among the happiest years of my life, and certainly if I gave anything in those days, I got a great deal in return from the men by whom I was surrounded and with whom I was associated.”<sup>2</sup>

And he wrote to Dr. Hazen:

“I have an affection for Middletown and its people out of all proportion to the length of my residence there—in proportion to the extraordinary kindliness and attractiveness of the community. I could wish that I might seem really to belong to it. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Good years they had been in every way: years of thought and work, crucial years of achieved maturity, the clarification of ideals, sharpening of aspiration, hardening of purpose. He was now to step into a larger field; he was to meet some of the opposition that he had not had at Wesleyan, and that, being the man he was, he somehow

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Robert Bridges, August 9, 1889.

<sup>2</sup>Letter of June 28, 1915, to W. W. Thompson. Printed in the *Wesleyan University Bulletin*, December, 1915, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup>July 18, 1900.

needed. Everyone was his friend at Wesleyan—he needed an enemy or so; everything he touched succeeded—he needed failure to bring out all that was in him. He needed to fight! “A delightful place to work . . . not . . . sufficiently stimulating.”





## INDEX



## INDEX

- Adams, Anne, Woodrow Wilson's paternal grandmother, 6-14
- Adams, Dr. Herbert B., of Johns Hopkins University, 175, 177, 178-9, 237, 256
- Alderman, Pres. Edwin A., 39 *footnote*
- Aldrich, Thomas Bailey, 269
- Atkinson, Edward, 313 *footnote*
- Atlantic Monthly*, Wilson's essay on "Responsible Government Under the Constitution," in, 265; Wilson's article, "Character of Democracy in the United States," in, 310
- Atwater, Professor, of Wesleyan University, 300
- Augusta Female Seminary (Mary Baldwin Seminary), 129
- Aurora*, The, early Philadelphia newspaper, 7, 8
- Axson, Edward, in a "gorgeous fight" at the Wilson-Axson wedding, 238; comes to live with the Wilsons at Bryn Mawr, 287
- Axson, Ellen Louise (see Ellen Axson Wilson)
- Axson, Rev. I. S. K., grandfather of Ellen Axson, 238
- Axson, Prof. Stockton, 147, 239, 290 *footnotes*; 317-18
- Bagehot, Walter, 196, 202, 211, 214, 216
- Barnwell, Charles H., teacher at Columbia, S. C., 59
- Barnwell, William, schoolmate, 59
- Bayard, James A., Secretary of State, 293-4
- Beaconsfield, Lord, 135
- Beecher, Henry Ward, lectures at Johns Hopkins University, 198
- Bellamy, John D., boyhood friend in Wilmington, N. C., 79
- Bellamy, Miss, 78 *footnote*
- Bemis, Prof. Edward W., at Johns Hopkins University, 178, 261 *footnote*
- Blaine, James G., Secretary of State, 308
- Blair, Joseph, fellow-student at University of Virginia, 132
- Bluntschli, Dr. J. C., his library at Johns Hopkins University, 176 *footnote*
- Bones, Helen W., 44 *footnote*
- Bones, James W., uncle, superintendent of Sunday school in Dr. Wilson's church at Augusta, Ga., 44; hears Wilson debate at University of Virginia, 122; Wilson spends Christmas holidays with, in 1879, 130; Wilson visits him at Rome, Ga., and meets Ellen Axson, 159
- Bones, Mrs. James W. (Marion Woodrow), Wilson's aunt, 65 *footnotes*, 160
- Bones, Jessie Woodrow (see Mrs. A. T. H. Brower)
- Bosworth, Mrs. George H., 6 *footnote*
- Boylston, Mrs. J. Reid, of Atlanta, Ga., Wilson lives at the home of, 142
- Bradford, Gamaliel, reviews *Congressional Government in the Nation*, 223, 228; visits Wilson, 224-5; Wilson calls on, in Boston in 1886, 270
- Bradford, Gamaliel, Jr., 225, 270
- Bridges, Robert, classmate at Princeton, 98, 99, 100-1 *footnotes*; 102, 105, 106, 151-3, 195, 223, 260, 266; 267 *footnote*; 283-5, 293-5 *footnotes*; 317, 321, 323, 324 *footnote*
- Bright, John, considered by young Wilson the greatest of living English orators, 187
- Brooke, Rev. Francis J., boyhood friend, 66, 71 *footnote*
- Brower, Mrs. (A. T. H.) Jessie Bones, 44, 57, 60 *footnotes*; 160
- Brown University, Wilson lectures at, on "State and Social Reforms," 310-11
- Bruce, Philip Alexander, 132 *footnote*
- Bruce, Senator William Cabell, fellow-student at University of Virginia, 113, 114, 117, 121, 129
- Bryan, William Jennings, a country lawyer in 1885, 254
- Bryant, David, negro butler in Wilson family, 78 *footnote*
- Bryce, James, lectures at Johns Hopkins University, 196; *The American Commonwealth*, 212; reads *Congressional Government* with enthusiasm, 224; review by Wilson of his *American Commonwealth*, 310
- Bryn Mawr College, Wilson offered a professorship at, 237; its foundation, 251; Wilson becomes a professor of history at, 251
- Byrd, Richard E., fellow-student at University of Virginia, 114
- Caldwell, Victor H., classmate at Davidson, 74 *footnote*
- Catholic element in the United States, subject of a debate between Woodrow Wilson and William Cabell Bruce at the University of Virginia, 121-123
- Chadwick, Rear-Admiral F. E., his enthusiasm for *Congressional Government*, 224
- Clark, Gen. W. A., 21 *footnote*

- Cleveland, Grover, admired by Wilson, 232-3  
*Congressional Government*, basis of, was Wilson's article, "Cabinet Government in the United States," 91; Wilson starts writing, 210-15; finishes and sends to Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 218; accepted for publication, 219; dedicated to his father, 221; how it was received, 222-4; a virile departure from ordinary commentaries, 226  
 Crawford, Prof. Morris B., 298
- Dabney, R. Heath, classmate at the University of Virginia, 113-15, 128-9, 131-4; 145, 148, 152 *footnotes*; 153-4, 168, 173, 179; 180, 263 *footnotes*; 276; 295 *footnote*; 296
- Daniels, Prof. Winthrop M., 5 *footnote*; on the filial affection between Woodrow Wilson and his father, 30; 310 *footnote*; describes his first meeting with Wilson, 320
- Davenport, Frederick M., 304 *footnote*
- Davidson College, North Carolina, Woodrow Wilson enters, 71, 73; President Wilson visits, in 1916, 77
- Davis, Dr. John D., classmate at Princeton, 103 *footnote*
- Depew, Chauncey M., pokes fun at the "deadly seriousness" of Wilson in a speech in New York in 1886, 265
- Derry, Prof. Joseph T., teacher of Woodrow Wilson, 42
- Dewey, Davis R., at Johns Hopkins University, 178, 180; 313 *footnote*
- Division and Reunion*, background of, 53; Professor Hart of Harvard asks Wilson to write, 306
- Duane, William, editor of the *Aurora*, 7
- Ely, Dr. Richard T., at Johns Hopkins University, 177, 179, 180
- Emery, M. G., classmate at Princeton, 105
- Fraser, Rev. A. M., 25, 74 *footnotes*
- Fleming, William H., schoolmate, 43, 47
- Fulton, Robert, conducts a special elocution class, which Wilson joins, 124
- Gibson, Thomas R., schoolmate, 42
- Gilman, Pres. Daniel Coit, of Johns Hopkins University, 171, 234
- Gladstone, a hero to Woodrow Wilson, 71, 87
- Glass, Frank P., fellow-student at Princeton, 82, 94
- Glenn, Gov. Robert, fellow-student at Davidson College, 74
- Godwin, Harold, classmate at Princeton, 87
- Gosse, Edmund, lectures at Johns Hopkins University, 197
- Gould, E. R. L., at Johns Hopkins University, 178
- Grady, Henry W., of the *Atlanta Constitution*, 139
- Grayson, Dr. Cary T., 68 *footnote*
- Hale, Edward Everett, 313 *footnote*
- Hale, William Bayard, author of *Woodrow Wilson*, 45, 246, *footnotes*
- Hall, Prof. G. Stanley, asks Wilson to assist him in teaching logic and psychology at Johns Hopkins, 234
- Halsey, A. W., classmate at Princeton, 105
- Hamilton, Peter J., classmate at Princeton, 105
- Hampton, Rev. William J., letter to, from Woodrow Wilson about his (Wilson's) mother, 34
- Harlow, Samuel A., classmate at Princeton, 105, 106
- Harper, Prof. George McLean, 302 *footnote*
- Hart, Prof. A. B., invites Wilson to write a book on *Division and Reunion*, 306
- Hayes-Tilden election, 90
- Hazen, Rev. Dr., A. W., 300, 319-20, 324
- Heath, D. C., Wilson calls on, in 1886, to discuss a textbook, to be called *The State*, 268, 275
- Hibben, Prof. John Grier, 20 *footnote*
- Hillyer, Judge George, presides at Wilson's examination for the bar, 148-9
- Hopkins, Edward Washburn, professor at Bryn Mawr, 253
- Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Wilson sends the first few chapters of *Congressional Government* to, 216; Wilson visits, at Boston, 267
- Howe, Rev. Dr. George, of Columbia (S. C.) Theological Seminary, 58; his loyalty to the Seminary, 62-3
- Howe, Wilson, nephew, in a "gorgeous fight" at Wilson's wedding, 238
- Hoyt, Florence, 244 *footnote*
- Hoyt, Mary W., 104, 161, 239 *footnotes*; comes to live with the Wilsons at Bryn Mawr, 287; spends Christmas holidays with the Wilsons at Wesleyan University, 318
- Hoyt, Dr. and Mrs. Thomas, 289, 317
- International Review* publishes Wilson's article on "Cabinet Government in the United States," 91, 211
- Isham, William B., classmate at Princeton, 103
- James, Professor, of Wesleyan University, 300
- Jameson, Dr. J. Franklin, of Johns Hopkins University, 177
- Jarvis, Governor, of North Carolina, 231
- Johns Hopkins University, Wilson at, 168-245; series of lectures by Wilson at, while he was at Bryn Mawr, 282; Wilson elected president of Alumni Association, 314



- Johnson, Mrs. Alba B., 5, 262, *footnotes*  
 Johnson, Mrs. A. C., 262 *footnote*
- Keener, Dean William A., schoolmate, 42  
 Keiser, Edward H., professor at Bryn Mawr, 253  
 Kent, Charles W., fellow-student at the University of Virginia, 123, 128, 132
- Lamar, Justice Joseph R., schoolmate, 42, 43  
 Lanier, Sidney, a student under Dr. James Woodrow, 21  
 Leckie, John William, room-mate at Davidson College, 74  
 Lee, General Robert E., one of Wilson's permanent heroes, 52  
 Leslie, Mrs. F. A., 272 *footnote*; 275  
 Levermore, Charles H., at Johns Hopkins University, 178  
 Lodge, Henry Cabot, as junior editor of the *International Review*, accepts an article by Wilson in Princeton, 91; one of the authorities cited by Wilson in his application for admission to Johns Hopkins University, 172-3  
 Lowell, Albert Lawrence, 269  
 Lowell, James Russell, at the opening of Bryn Mawr, 253  
 Lucy, Henry W. ("Toby, M. P."), 88
- Martin, Chalmers, classmate at Princeton, 105  
 Mary Baldwin Seminary, 129 *footnote*  
 Mayrant, Miss Katie (*see* Mrs. Kate Mayrant Simons)  
 McAdoo, Mrs. William G. (Eleanor Randolph Wilson), 41, 84 *footnote*; 317  
 McCosh, Pres. James, of Princeton, 82, 83-4  
 McDaniel, Governor, of Georgia, inauguration of, 156  
 McDowell, Rev. Dr. John, 71 *footnote*  
 McMurtrie, Miss Mary, 262 *footnote*  
 Medary, Samuel, 9  
 Merriam, Prof. Charles E., 213 *footnote*  
 Michigan, University of, tentative offer to Wilson to teach at, 256  
 Minor, Dr. John B., head of the law department of the University of Virginia, 112  
 Mitchell, Charlie, classmate at Princeton, 100  
 Mitchell, Dr. Weir, 249  
 Moody, Dwight L., admired and esteemed by Wilson, 315-16  
 Moore, John Bassett, fellow-student at University of Virginia, 114, 117
- New Princeton Review*, Wilson's essay, "Of the Study of Politics," in, 282; Wilson's essay, "An Old Master," in, 299-300  
 Nicholson, Dean Frank W., 305 *footnote*
- Overland Monthly*, Wilson's article on "Committee or Cabinet Government," in, 181, 185, 212
- Page, Walter Hines, as a reporter for the New York *World* first meets Woodrow Wilson at Atlanta, Ga., 145; reviews *Congressional Government* in the Charlotte, N. C., *Chronicle*, 222  
 Parnell, charges against, based on forged letters, 309  
 Partch, A. W., 304 *footnote*  
 Peeples, Mr., of Atlanta, Ga., 148 *footnote*  
*Pennsylvania Advocate*, newspaper founded by James Wilson, 11  
 Percy, Le Roy, fellow-student at University of Virginia, 114  
 Phi Beta Kappa, Wilson taken into, 314  
*Political Science Quarterly*, Wilson's article, "The Study of Administration," in, 282  
 Pope, Paul W., fellow-student at Princeton, 82  
 Preston, George, fellow-student at University of Virginia, 132  
 Price, Prof. C. F., 300-1, 305 *footnotes*  
 Princeton University, Wilson a student at, 81-106
- Renick, Edward Ireland, Wilson's first law partner, 140-1; friendship with Wilson, 143; his "unqualified praise" of *Congressional Government*, 223; suggests that Wilson try for Assistant Secretaryship of State, 266, 293; an underpaid official in the Treasury, 267
- Rhoads, Dr. James E., president of Bryn Mawr College, 237, 252, 253, 259  
 Rice, Prof. William North, 300; 322 *footnote*  
 Robinson, Mrs. George O., 262 *footnote*  
 Roosevelt, Theodore, on the "Irish representatives of the Covenanters" in America, 3; on his ranch in Dakota in 1885, 253  
 Rorer, Mrs., gives cooking lessons to Ellen Axson Wilson, 288  
 Royall, Anne, describes visit to Judge James Wilson, 12  
 Royce, Prof. Josiah, visits Johns Hopkins University, 196-7  
 Rusk, Jeremiah, Secretary of Agriculture, 308
- Salmon, Dr. Lucy M., 261, 290 *footnotes*  
 Savage, Miss Anna, 80 *footnote*  
 Sayre, Mrs. Francis B. (Jessie Woodrow Wilson), 84 *footnote*; born August 28, 1887, 285  
 Scott, Charlotte Angas, professor at Bryn Mawr, 253  
 Scribner, Mrs. Arthur H., 262 *footnote*  
 Scudder, Horace E., 4; meets Wilson in Boston in 1886, 268; in letters to, Wilson plans a

- Novum organum* in politics, 271-3, 277, 310;  
323 *footnote*
- Shaw, Dr. Albert, 177, 215, 224, 293
- Shaw, Cornelia, author of *History of Davidson College*, 73 *footnote*
- Shepherd, S. J., fellow-student at University of Virginia, 128 *footnote*
- Shorey, Paul, professor at Bryn Mawr, 253
- Simons, Mrs. Kate Mayrant, taught stenography by Wilson, 143
- Sloane, John, letter from James Wilson to, 10
- Southall, Dr. Stephen O., of the University of Virginia, 112
- Southern Presbyterian Church, organized, 52-3
- Spalding, Mrs. (Effie Southworth), 262
- Stalker, Dr. James, author of *Life of John Knox*, 69 *footnote*
- Starr, Harris E., 106 *footnote*
- State, The*, Wilson discusses, with D. C. Heath in 1886, 268; starts work on, 275; "a big task," 276; Wilson's notes for, 285-6; published in the fall of 1889, 306
- Stephens, Governor Alexander, of Georgia, 156 *footnote*
- Stovall, Pleasant, schoolmate, 42, 43
- Taft, William H., a county solicitor in Cincinnati in 1885, 254
- Talcott, Charles, classmate at Princeton, 94, 98; 99 *footnote*; 101, 103; 116, 118 *footnotes*; 125, 127 *footnote*; 194-5; his "solemn covenant" with Woodrow Wilson, 103-4, 110, 184, 227, 231, 247, 279-81
- Taylor, W. G., *footnote* 16
- Tedcastle, Mrs. A. W., *footnote* 161
- Thomas, Dr. M. Carey, of Bryn Mawr College, urges Wilson to try for Ph. D. degree at Johns Hopkins, 236, 278; meets Wilson to discuss professorship at Bryn Mawr, 237; the genius of the beginnings of Bryn Mawr, 251-3; 260 *footnote*; difficult for Wilson to work with, 264
- Thompson, W. W., 324 *footnote*
- Titus, Mrs., daughter of Mrs. Josiah Wright, 82
- "Toby, M. P." (*see* Henry W. Lucy)
- Tremain, Mary, a student in Wilson's class at Bryn Mawr, 262; 291 *footnote*
- Trumbull, Lyman, speech in Illinois admired by young Wilson in 1880, 126
- Tulane University, tentative offer to Wilson to teach at, 256
- Van Dyke, Dr. Henry, comments on Wilson's speech before Princeton alumni gathering in 1886, 265
- Van Meter, J. M., 59 *footnote*
- Van Vleck, Prof. E. B., 298; 299 *footnote*
- Verdery, Mrs. E. F., 33, 47 *footnotes*
- Virginia, University of, Woodrow Wilson a student at, 108-137; Wilson declined presidency of, 132
- Wake Forest College confers his first honorary degree on Wilson, 314
- Walker, General Francis, 313 *footnote*
- Wanamaker, John, Postmaster General, 308
- Ward, David Clymer, 72 *footnote*
- Washington, Life of*, by Weems, 37
- Webb, Sidney, 310 *footnote*
- Webster, J. Edwin, letter to, classmate at Princeton, 101
- Weems's *Life of Washington*, 37
- Welles, Mrs. Harriet Woodrow, 31, 33, 66 *footnotes*; young Wilson falls in love with, 130; letters to, 136-7
- Wesleyan University, Wilson a professor of history and political economy at, 298-325
- Western Herald and Steubenville Gazette*, newspaper owned by James Wilson, 9, 11
- Whaling, Rev. Dr. Thornton, 21, 141 *footnotes*
- White, William Allen, 106 *footnote*
- Williamson, Marion, Woodrow Wilson's maternal grandmother, 16, 18
- Wilson, Anne, 58
- Wilson, Edith Bolling, 105, 301 *footnotes*
- Wilson, Edmund B., professor at Bryn Mawr, 253
- Wilson, Eleanor Randolph (*see* Mrs. William G. McAdoo)
- Wilson, Ellen Axson, meets Woodrow Wilson and becomes engaged to him, 159-67; confirmed Woodrow Wilson in his aspirations, 171; greatly widened Wilson's horizons in literature, art, and architecture, 201-7; urges Wilson to complete his work at Johns Hopkins, 235-6; married to Woodrow Wilson at Savannah, Ga., June 24, 1885, 238; their courtship, 239-44; doubtful about the question of Wilson teaching at Bryn Mawr, 255-9; daughter, Margaret, born April 16, 1866, 266; studies German to help her husband, 275-6; daughter, Jessie Woodrow, born August 28, 1887, 285; the family life in the cottage at Bryn Mawr, 285-9; at Middletown, Conn., when Wilson becomes professor at Wesleyan University, 298; home life at Wesleyan, 317; third daughter, Eleanor Randolph, born October, 1889, 317; (*see also* *footnote* references to Woodrow Wilson's letters to her, throughout the volume, too numerous to list)
- Wilson, James, Woodrow Wilson's grandfather, 6-14
- Wilson, Jessie Woodrow (*see* Mrs. Francis B. Sayre)
- Wilson, Rev. Dr. Joseph Ruggles, Woodrow Wilson's father; birth, 10; youth, 12-14; marriage and ordination, 23; pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Staunton, Va., 23-4;

- Wilson, Rev. Dr. Joseph Ruggles—*Continued.*  
 pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Augusta, Ga., 26, 29-30; an extraordinary man, 31; companion and teacher for his son, 37-41; his sermons, 46; a Southern sympathizer, 52; Southern Presbyterian Church organized in his church, 52; establishes Sunday school for Negroes, 53; appointed professor at Columbia, S. C., Theological Seminary, 57; pastor at Columbia, S. C., 58; inscription on stone over his grave written by Woodrow Wilson, 72; moves to Wilmington, N. C., 78; tablet commemorating his pastorate at Wilmington, N. C., 78 *footnote*; all his life regretted that his son had not chosen the ministry, 89; *Congressional Government* dedicated to him, 221-2; at his son's wedding, 238; advises his son about teaching at Bryn Mawr, 260; visits the Wilsons at Bryn Mawr, 288
- Wilson, Joseph Ruggles, Jr., brother of Woodrow Wilson, 30 *footnote*; 35, 134
- Wilson, Margaret, daughter, 70 *footnote*; born April 16, 1886, 266
- Wilson, Woodrow, of Scotch-Irish and Scotch lineage, 1-5; on Scotch-Irish in America, 3-4; proud of his origin, 4-6; his paternal grandfather, James Wilson, and paternal grandmother, Anne Adams, 6-14; his father Rev. Dr. Joseph Ruggles Wilson (*q. v.*), 10 *ff.*; his mother Jessie (Janet) Woodrow (*q. v.*), 13 *ff.*; his maternal ancestors, the Wodrows, 14-19; his maternal grandfather, Rev. Dr. Thomas Woodrow, 14, 16, 18, 19; Marion Williamson, his maternal grandmother, 16, 18; birth, 23; named Thomas Woodrow, 24-5; boyhood in Georgia, 28; tributes to his mother, 34-5; intimate association with his father, 37-40; early education, 40; attends Prof. Joseph T. Derry's school at Augusta, Ga., 42; life at Augusta, 43; organizes the "Lightfoot Club," 45; a Presbyterian, in the church of his father, 46-8; his most impressionable years spent in the atmosphere of the Civil War, 49-55, 58; moves with family to Columbia, S. C., 57; his interest in the sea and in literature of the sea, 60-1; his environment at Columbia, S. C., 61-5; becomes a member of First Presbyterian Church at Columbia, S. C., 67; religious convictions, 68-70; enters Davidson College, in North Carolina, 71, 73; his standings at Davidson College, 75; chosen a member of the Eumenean Society at Davidson, 75; his first recorded public appearance, 76; returns home to Columbia, and later moves with family to Wilmington, N. C., 78; life at Wilmington, 78; enters Princeton, Sept., 1875, 81; finds first year at Princeton difficult, and joins the Whig Society, 85-6; his second year at Princeton a turning-point in his life, 86-90; a student of democratic government, 90; writes an article "Cabinet Government in the United States," 91; practises orations of famous orators, 92; writes an article on oratory, for the *Princetonian*, of which he was editor, 92; active as a debater in the Whig Society, 93-4; organizes a Liberal Debating Club, 94; follows political events at home and in Europe, 95; his definition of statesmanship, 95; devours Green's *Short History of the English People*, 96; his Commencement address on "Our Kinship with England," 96; forms an idea of writing a history of the American people, 97; winner of sophomore oratorical prize and the Nassau literary prize, 98; college friendships, 98; central figure in the "Witherspoon gang," 99; enjoys being called "Tommie, simply," 102; enjoys the theatre and maintains his religious interests, 103; his solemn covenant with Charles Talcott, 103-4, 110; his "aspirations" to be a Senator, 104; decides not to enter in the Lynde prize debate, 105-6; would not debate against his convictions, 106-7; graduated from Princeton in June, 1879, 108; decides to study law, 109; enters the University of Virginia, October 2, 1879, 111; his signature, "T. Woodrow Wilson," 111 *footnote*; tablet over the door of the room he occupied at 31 West Range, 113-14; joins the Jefferson debating society and becomes a member of the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity, and of the Glee Club, 115, 118; bored by the study of law, 116; list of books read in 1879-80, 117; delivers an oration on John Bright, 119; writes an essay on Gladstone, 121; his debate with William Cabell Bruce, 121-23; elected president of the Jefferson Society and revises its constitution, 123-24; calls political convention system a curse, 125; criticizes the Republican and Democratic parties, 126-7; suffers a physical breakdown, and leaves the University of Virginia, 127; held in high regard by his fellows at Virginia, 127; in love with "Hattie" Woodrow, 130; studying law books in the Manse at Wilmington, N. C., 131; his life at Wilmington not happy, 134; teaches Latin to his younger brother, 134; still practises elocution, 136; criticizes observance of Decoration Day, 136; permutations of his signature—now signs himself "Woodrow Wilson," 137; starts practising law at Atlanta, Ga., with Edward Ireland Renick, 139-41; lives at the home of Mrs. J. Reid Boylston in Atlanta, 142; starts filling his bookcase, 143; meets Walter Page, of the *New York World*, 145; appears before the Tariff Commission of Atlanta, 145-47; or-



Wilson, Woodrow—*Continued.*

ganizes a branch of the Free Trade Club of New York, 148; admitted to the Bar, 149; studies the Georgia legislature, 150; as a lawyer, never had a case of his own, 151; discouraged as a lawyer, 152; his articles rejected by the *Nation*, 153; ". . . what I write may some day see the light and masquerade in print," 153; decides to abandon Atlanta and study at Johns Hopkins University, 154; suffers for lack of intellectual companionship, 155; on the American idea of the State, 155; ". . . the practice of the law, when conducted for purposes of gain, is antagonistic to the best interests of the intellectual life," 155; visits his uncle James Bones at Rome, Ga., meets Ellen Axson and becomes engaged to her, 159-67; in 1883 decides to give up his attempt to practise law, and to study at Johns Hopkins University, 168; fellowship at Johns Hopkins denied him, 171; his purpose in studying at Johns Hopkins, 172; downcast because there is no course of study in comparative politics, 174; boards at 146 North Charles Street, 175; moves to 8 McCulloh St., 176; "has it out" with Dr. Herbert B. Adams, 179; plans to write a history of American economic thought with Davis R. Dewey, 180; starts study which was later to develop into his first book, *Congressional Government*, 181; writes an article for the *Overland Monthly* on "Committee or Cabinet Government," 181; his courses appear as interruptions to his own studies, 181-2, 185; works hard to improve his power of expression, 184; practises public speaking, 186-7; suffers ill health from overwork, 188-9; social life at Johns Hopkins, 190-3; friendships at Johns Hopkins, 193-6; admiration for leaders of thought who lectured at Johns Hopkins, 196-9; his "sense of power in dealing with men collectively," 199; reorganizes the debating society at Johns Hopkins and writes a new constitution and set of by-laws for it, 199-200; his tastes in literature, art, and the drama, 200-7; his interest in accurate pronunciation, 203-4; his religious ideas, 207-10; writing *Congressional Government*, 210-16; finishes it and sends it to Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 218; reads chapters of it at Johns Hopkins, 218-19; *Congressional Government* accepted for publication, 219; sends the first copy to Ellen Axson, 220-1; the book dedicated to his father, 221; how the book was received, 222-4; receives a visit from Gamaliel Bradford, 224-5; his ambition for a statesman's career, 228-30; distrusts both political parties, 231; his sympathies with Cleveland, 232; offered a fellowship at Johns

Hopkins, 234; urged by Ellen Axson, returns to Johns Hopkins for second year, but balks at "cramming" for Ph. D. degree, 235-6; but receives degree later, 235; offered a professorship at Bryn Mawr College, 237; married to Ellen Louise Axson at Savannah, Ga., June 24, 1885, 238; his impetuous courtship, 239-41; his views on "a woman's right to live her own life," 240; his life as an educator, the active years of his preparation for the Presidency, 246-50; a professor of history at Bryn Mawr, 251; in 1885 had little sympathy for the higher education of women, 254; has had tentative offers from Tulane and Michigan universities, 256; his letters to Ellen Axson on the question of teaching at Bryn Mawr, 256-60; his small classes at Bryn Mawr, 261; a picture of him at Bryn Mawr, 263; chafes at limitations of his surroundings, 264; addresses Princeton alumni gathering in New York on "The College and the Government," and is chagrined at his failure, 265; writes an essay, "Responsible Government Under the Constitution," for the *Atlantic Monthly*, 265; looks for a position in the Department of State and visits Congress for the first time, 266; daughter (Margaret) born April 16, 1886, 266; discusses with D. C. Heath a textbook to be called *The State*, 268; visits his publishers in Boston, 267; plans a *Novum organum* of politics, 271-74; starts work on *The State*, 275; considers the possibility of studying in Berlin, 277-8; goes to Johns Hopkins for his Ph. D. degree, 278; in letter to Charles Talcott, says he wants to meet "men who have direct touch of the world," and wants to renew his "solemn covenant," 279-81; his idea of a group of thoughtful young men getting together—or by correspondence—to make themselves felt in public life, 280-2; gives up thought of going to Berlin and arranges for a series of lectures at Johns Hopkins, 282; his essay, "Of the Study of Politics," in the *New Princeton Review*, March, 1887, 282; his article, "The Study of Administration," in the *Political Science Quarterly*, June, 1887, 282 footnote; under a *nom de plume* tries to write stories for Scribner's, 283; rents a cottage at Bryn Mawr, 283-5; daughter, Jessie Woodrow, born August 28, 1887, 285; his notes for *The State*, 285-6; life in the cottage at Bryn Mawr, 287-9; not contented at Bryn Mawr, 289; his method of teaching, 290-1; urged by his friend Renick to try for Assistant Secretaryship of State, 293-4; death of his mother, 294-5; ". . . hungry for a class of men," 295; his deep satisfaction with his married life, 296; professor of history and political economy at



Wilson, Woodrow—*Continued.*

- Wesleyan University, 298; lives at 106 High St., Middletown, Conn., 299; his essay, "An Old Master," published in the *New Princeton Review*, 299-300; with Mrs. Wilson joins the First Congregational Church, at Middletown, 300; organizes the Wesleyan House of Commons, 303; helps to build up a great football team at Wesleyan, 305; his book, *The State*, published, 306; the election of Harrison a profound disappointment to him, 307-8; follows British and French political affairs, 308-9; reviews Bryce's *American Commonwealth*, 310; writes an article, "Character of Democracy in the United States," for the *Atlantic Monthly*, 310; lectures at Brown University on "State and Social Reforms," 310-11; an intense traditionalist, 313; begins to be honoured, 314; a new "coming to himself," this time politically, 314; his religious spirit, 316-17; home life at Wesleyan, 317; third daughter, Eleanor Randolph, born, October, 1889, 317; recreations, 321-2; the Wesleyan *Argus* regrets his leaving the college, 322-3; college offered to create a chair for him if he would remain, 323; refused to leave Wesleyan after one year, 323-4
- Winchester, Prof. C. T., 299 *footnote*; 300
- Windom, Secretary of the Treasury, 308
- Winsor, Mr., librarian at Harvard, 268
- Wirt, William, author of *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry*, 122 *footnote*
- Withington, Dr. I. P., fellow-student at Princeton, 98
- Wodrows, the, early ancestors of Woodrow Wilson, 14-22
- Woodrow, Harriet (*see* Mrs. Harriet Woodrow Welles)
- Woodrow, Prof. James, his character interpretive of the Woodrow side of Wilson, 19-22; attacked for his views on evolution, 209-10
- Woodrow, Mrs. James, aunt of Woodrow Wilson, 25
- Woodrow, James Wilson, 32 *footnote*
- Woodrow, Jessie (Janet), Woodrow Wilson's mother: birth, 16; marriage, 13-14, 23; tablet in her honour, 17 *footnote*; moved to Staunton, Va., where Woodrow Wilson was born, 24; of strong religious feeling, touched with poetry, 32-3; at Columbia, S. C., 58-9; writes to her son when he first starts practising law at Atlanta, 141-2; death of, 294-5
- Woodrow, Miss Marion, cousin of Woodrow Wilson, 21 *footnote*
- Woodrow, Rev. Dr. Thomas, Woodrow Wilson's maternal grandfather, 14, 16, 18, 19
- Woods, Daisy, 195
- Woods, Dr. Hiram, classmate at Princeton, 86, 91; 93-4 *footnotes*; 98, 101, 189, 192, 195
- Woods, Nellie, 195
- Wright, Mrs. Josiah, boarding-house keeper at Princeton, 82
- Wylly, Judge Albert, fellow-student at Princeton, 85, 98 *footnotes*
- Yager, Arthur, Governor, at Johns Hopkins University, 178







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